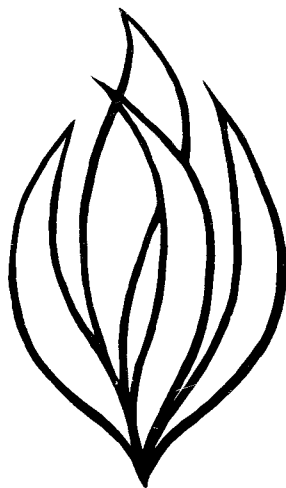


A Burning Fire



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



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Joshua's Farewell Address

Parting words, farewell addresses and death bed statements of great men live long after they have gone. Such words have great meaning because of the greatness of the one who spoke them. History records many soul-stirring and thrilling final remarks uttered by great men, kings, presidents and men of renown for one reason or another. How well many can remember the words of General Douglas MacArthur before Congress as he concluded fifty-two years of military service for his country. Both friend and foe alike consider his speech a masterpiece.

The greatest remarks were those of the Lord Jesus as He was about to ascend into heaven. His remarks included that Great Commission to *"go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* In the Bible we have the farewell words of men like Moses, Samuel and others. We want to consider in this lesson six major points that were made by Joshua in his farewell address before the nation he had led for so many years.

Joshua was one of Israel's greatest men. He had been loyal to Israel as a spy, a mighty warrior, faithful servant of Moses and the successor to Moses. He was the conqueror of Canaan, the administrator of the division of the land to the tribes, a man whose life was characterized by faith, courage, determination, steadfastness and a long association with God.

His final words are found in Joshua 23 and 24. What we want to study is found in chapter 24. The chapter begins with Joshua recounting Israel's history from Terah, the father of Abraham, down to his own time. He reminds Israel of some principles how God deals with men and what God expects in return. His words are as useful to us as to Israel of long ago because even though

Even though we serve under a different system, we serve the same God. The principles of God's dealing with mankind have not changed. Nor have the characteristics of God changed. Joshua makes six primary points in his speech.

God's Promises

Joshua told how the Lord keeps His promises. *"And behold, this day I am going the way of all the earth; and ye know in all your hearts and in your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning*

you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing has failed thereof.” (Joshua 24:14). Earlier we read in Joshua 21:45, “There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass.”

That the Lord keeps His promises is echoed in the New Testament. *“For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.” (Hebrews 6:13-15). “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for he is faithful that promised.” (Hebrews 10:23 “Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.” (Hebrews 11:11). “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise...” (Second Peter 3:9).*

The Lord has made great and precious promises to the Christian, such as forgiveness, protection, providence, fellowship and heaven. Our God always keeps His promises.

God's Power

Joshua noted how the Lord gives evidence of His power. *“And ye have seen all that the Lord your God hath done unto all these nations because of you...” (Joshua 23:3). He calls Israel to witness of the manifestations of the power of God.*

It seems with many it is easier to accept what can be seen than that which cannot be seen. People more readily accept the physical than the spiritual. That which cannot be seen is accepted by faith, but not a blind and gullible faith, but faith based on evidence (Hebrews 11:1). The Lord is called *“invisible”* in Colossians 1:15 and First Timothy 1:17. This is because God is Spirit (John 4:24), not *“like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device.”* (Acts 17:29). Even so, God has revealed Himself to man by the presentation of evidence of His presence and reality so we *“walk by faith and not by sight.”* (Second Corinthians 5:7). Paul wrote, *“For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.”* (Romans 1:20). Psalm 19:1, *“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handywork.”* God has not failed us in providing sufficient evidence of His existence and

power. As we observe nature, we know there is God. As we study the Biblical history of Israel, the prophecies and the fulfillment of them, the influence of Christianity, the indestructibility of the Bible, all these things show the existence and power of God. In every age, these things testify of Him.

God and His People

Joshua also said the Lord fights for His people. Joshua 23:3, *"For the Lord your God is he that hath fought for you."* He reminded them of their victories over Egypt and their deliverance from bondage. He could have mentioned their trials in the wilderness on their way to Canaan, the taking of Jericho, Gideon over the Midianites, David over Goliath. Regarding the nations that had a part in humbling Judah, Zechariah said, *"Then shall the Lord go forth and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle."* (Zechariah 14:3). Nehemiah told his followers as they rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, *"Our God shall fight for us."* (Nehemiah 4:20).

God has always been mindful of the battles His children must fight. He is *"not far from everyone of us."* (Acts 17:7). He is our Shepherd that provides for us even in the presence of our enemies. Even in death we are to have no fear for He has promised to be with us (Psalm 23). *"The Lord is my helper and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."* (Hebrews 13:6). When you fight for what is right, the Lord fights with you and for you, just as He has always done for those who love Him.

God's Expectations

The Lord does expect man to obey His will. *"Be ye therefore very courageous to keep and to do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, that ye turn not aside therefrom to the right hand or to the left."* (Joshua 23:6). Strict obedience is one of the superior themes of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. Even though we are not under the law of Moses, we are under law, the law of Christ. Being under grace in no way dismisses the necessity that we must obey the law of Christ. Obedience has always been required by the Lord. It was required of Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel, Abraham, Jacob, Moses and Israel. It is no less required of us. *"He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."* (Hebrews 5:9). *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven,*

but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 7:21). As Samuel said to Saul, *“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.”* (First Samuel 15:22). When confronted with threatenings if they continued to preach Christ, Peter and John responded, *“We must obey God rather than men.”* (Acts 5:29). We are the servants of what we obey (Romans 6:16-18). Our hearts are purified by obeying the truth (First Peter 1:22).

Sin and Its Consequences

Joshua also reminded Israel that God warns His people of evil and the consequences of sin. *“That ye come not among these nations, these that remain among you; neither make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause to swear by them, neither serve them, not bow yourselves unto them.”* (Joshua 23:7). *“Take good heed therefore unto yourselves, that ye love the Lord your God. Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them and they to you. Know for a certainty that the Lord your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you.”* (Joshua 23:11-14). God warned them.

Why does God warn man in such strong terms? It is because He is a loving, merciful and kind God who wants man to avoid sin and self-imposed destruction. He wishes to put man on guard and keep him alert to the wiles of Satan. It is much the same reason a godly parent will warn his children of danger and evil. It is for the child's welfare.

Both the Old and New Testaments contain God's warnings. He warned Noah of the coming flood and how to be spared from it (Hebrews 11:7). In Ezekiel 3:17, *“Son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore, hear the word at my mouth and give them warning from me.”* We ought to be grateful that God cares enough to warn us. Paul described his work of preaching, teaching and warning every man *“that every man may be perfect in Christ Jesus.”* (Colossians 1:28). Paul warned elders, preachers, congregations, saints and sinners alike. *“Now we exhort you brethren, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.”*

(Acts 20:31). *"I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you."* (First Corinthians 4:14). Joshua tells us God is gracious to us in giving us warnings.

God's Threats

Finally, from Joshua we learn that God keeps His threats just as surely as He keeps His promises. *"Therefore it shall come to pass, that as all good things are come upon us which the Lord your God promised you, so shall the Lord bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the Lord your God hath given you. When ye have transgressed the covenant of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed yourselves to them, then shall the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off this good land which he hath given you."* (Joshua 23:15,16).

God is a God of reward. But He is also a God of recompense. *"Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord."* (Hebrews 10:30). We err to rely on His promises but ignore His warnings and threats. One is as sure as the other. If He were otherwise, He would not be reliable nor just. We need to learn that hell is as real as heaven and damnation as sure as salvation.

As surely as the five wise virgins entered the marriage feast, the five foolish ones were excluded. As surely as the five and two talent men were commended and rewarded, the one talent man was condemned. As surely as those that fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick were welcomed, those that did not were disowned (Matthew 25). God keeps His threats.

In summary, the six points Joshua made are: (1) God keeps His promises; (2) God has given evidence of His existence and power; (3) God fights for His people; (4) God expects man to obey Him; (5) God warns His people of evil and its consequences; (6) God keeps His threats.

History shows that Israel failed to give heed to the great truths Joshua preached to them. But will we do any better? Will we profit from their error? While we serve the same Jehovah God, will Joshua's address do any more for us than Israel allowed it to do for them?

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Inspiration of the Bible

There can be little doubt that this lesson deals with one of today's religious battlegrounds. The Bible is here. None can deny that. But how did it come into being? Where did it come from? Strange as it may sound, many Christians do not know. Many young people have never been informed.

Is the Bible just another outstanding piece of literature but nothing more? Is it wholly of men? Is it wholly of God? If wholly of God, how did it take the form it now has?

We contend that men would not have produced the Bible even if they could have done it because it condemns too much that men love and commends many things from which men turn away. The contents of the Bible are beyond the scope of human knowledge. If the Bible came entirely from men the writers would have condemned themselves because the Bible claims to have come from God. The writer would be calling themselves liars and condemning lying at the same time. That hardly sounds likely and probable.

But if the Bible came entirely from God, how do you explain the obvious difference of styles of writing found in it? Was it presented to man all written out, like the first set of the tablets of stone given to Moses? Why are there four accounts of the life of Christ on earth rather than just one? Why is there such a variance of vocabularies in the books?

God and Man

The truth is that the Bible is a product of the combination of God and man with each having something to do with it. We want to learn just what each has done. Peter wrote, *"Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit."* (Second Peter 1:21). Holy men, guided by the Holy Spirit, produced the Bible.

Is the Bible inspired? If so, what is the nature of that inspiration? Even modernists and unbelievers will admit that there is a sense in which the Bible is inspired, if you let them define inspiration. The Bible claims that it is inspired of God. *"All scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly*

furnished unto all good works." (Second Timothy 3:16,17). The Scriptures are replete with such expressions as *"thus saith the Lord," "The Lord said,"* and similar words. The writers of the Bible never claimed that they wrote of themselves, but claimed they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

So the claim of the Bible is not that it merely contains the word of God but that it is the very word of God. Notice some of the statements we find in it.

Attitude of Jesus

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (Second Peter 1:21). God said to Moses, *"Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say."* (Exodus 4:12). David wrote, *"The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue."* (Second Samuel 23:1,2). Jesus endorsed the Old Testament in its three divisions (Luke 24:44). These three divisions, as the Jews divided them, correspond to the thirty-nine books that we have in the Old Testament. He placed His endorsement on the record of creation (Matthew 19:8), the account of the flood at the time of Noah (Matthew 24:37), and even the record of Jonah and the fish (Matthew 12:40). While unbelievers today may consider such accounts as mere legends, Jesus considered them historical. No man can claim to be a true follower of Jesus and contend that Jesus did not know what He was talking about regarding these matters.

When Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness, He used the word of God to put him to flight (Matthew 4). *"It is written..."* has always been the most effective weapon against Satan. All three of the quotations that Jesus cited came from the book of Deuteronomy. Little wonder that the skeptical and modernistic critics of the Bible, who are servants of the devil, have made their first attacks against Biblical integrity on this book.

Jesus promised His apostles that they would be guided in what to say (Matthew 10:19,20; John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13). On the day of Pentecost, the apostles spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:4). What Paul preached did not come from man, but was revealed to him through Christ (Galatians 1:11). What the Thessalonians received was not the word of

man, but of God (First Thessalonians 2:13). In Corinth, Paul said he spoke not in *"words which man's wisdom teacheth but which the Holy Spirit teacheth,"* (First Corinthians 2:13). This is verbal inspiration. John, in Revelation, urged the seven churches of Asia to *"hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."* Unquestionably, the Bible claims to be the inspired, all-sufficient, infallible, inerrant and authoritative word of God.

There are those who object to using the statements of the Bible to support its own claims. But this is illogical, unfair and discriminatory. If one wanted to determine the contents of a bottle, must not he study its contents? If the nature of a nugget of metal wished to be determined, must not one study the nugget itself? So it is with Scripture.

Nature of Biblical Inspiration

What is the nature of the Biblical claim of inspiration? Some would say it is inspired only as was Shakespeare, Milton, other writers of fame. They would strip away all signs of Deity regarding it. But Paul asserted that the Scriptures were inspired of God, literally meaning "God breathed." They were filled with the breath of God. They are the product of the Divine Spirit. They were given through the Holy Spirit.

Inspiration implies an influence from without, producing effects which are beyond natural powers. Those who wrote were therefore overshadowed power outside themselves, and that power was God. The power was not some "force" but the personal true and living God of heaven.

Inspiration is more than just receiving a revelation. When anyone is informed of something they have received a revelation. If someone tells you the time of day, you have received a revelation. Inspiration is the reception of a revelation, but a revelation from God and that revelation is preserved from error, is absolute, and is infallibly accurate. Everything revealed in the Bible is inspired, therefore, the inspired ones were infallibly guided in their record. Anyone who claims to believe the Bible but denies the verbal and plenary inspiration of it just does not really believe the Bible.

Some have said that only the thoughts of the Bible are inspired, but not the words. The thoughts are inspired. But how are the thoughts expressed without words? These words are not man's interpretations of what God was saying and thinking. Peter said (Second Peter 1:21) that such was not the case. Jesus

promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would not only provide how to speak but also what to speak. This is the inspired word itself. Paul delivered sermons in the very words the Holy Spirit chose to use.

While the Holy Spirit moved the penman to write, the Spirit used words from the vocabularies of the writers to express Deity's thoughts. Inspiration did not make man a mere robot. It utilized human faculties, using the distinctive features of each writer, but so overshadowed the selection of words from the vocabularies of each writer that the word is in fact the word of God. In this way the divine thoughts are revealed through inspired words written by inspired men.

The writers were not mere machines. The divine side, God, gave through men, clearly and faithfully, what Deity wished to reveal and communicate, using human means of communication that the writers possessed. Such is the nature of the inspiration of the Bible.

Inspiration did not make these men immune from bodily affliction. It did not grant them infallible knowledge as astronomers, doctors, economists, etc. They were inspired as teachers and writers of God's word. It did not even make them immune from temptation and sin. It meant that what they wrote was truly reported. They reported the lies of the devil, the evil deeds of men, the good things of men, the actions of Deity, all of it just as it was.

The Evidence

There are irrefutable evidences that this is the nature of the Bible. Even though the Bible is not a scientific book, when it speaks of scientific matters, it speaks correctly. Many statements of a scientific nature are found that could not have been known by men at that time. Isaiah contemplated the rotundity of the earth. Job mentioned the emptiness of the northern sky. David wrote of the paths or currents in the sea. Job mentioned how God hangeth the earth on nothing. There is not one proven scientific fact that conflicts with the scientific information discussed in the Bible. How could these writers, living hundreds and thousands of years before men of science discovered these things, have known of them except the Creator of it all informed them of it?

There is impartiality in the Bible. When men write of their enemies or their heroes their biases come through. But in the

Bible God's heroes are reported doing both good and evil. There is fairness, frankness, even of the "worthies" of the Bible like Abraham, Moses, David and Peter. This is not characteristic of writings of purely human origin.

Unlike human writings Scripture does not cater to human curiosity. Where was Moses buried? What did Christ look like? How did Paul die? Where was Joseph's house in Nazareth? All these things men want to know and if humans had chosen what to include, such trivia would have been in it.

The unity and oneness of the Bible is a marvel. Even though the Bible is composed of sixty-six books, thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament, it is one book from start to finish. Even though over forty different writers were used, and the writing time spanned over fifteen hundred years, there is one story, one central personality (Jesus Christ), one theme (God's way of saving man), one primary goal and purpose. It is as a portrait painted by different artists in different times, in different countries, unknown to each other, each painting a portion of the portrait, and when their work is completed and compiled there is a magnificent portrait. How else can that be explained except divine guidance and oversight?

The prophecy and fulfillment element of the Bible cannot be answered as evidence of divine inspiration. It is only denied and brushed away with the wave of the skeptical hand, but not answered. How could men foretell events over which they would have no control literally thousands of years before they occurred, and they happen just as they predicted, except there was divine oversight in both the prediction and the fulfillment? Space prohibits the citation of the multitude of prophetic statements and their accomplishment, but Bible students are aware of these things.

Add to all this the indestructibility of the Bible even though many efforts to destroy it have been attempted, the anticipation of false doctrines and answers to them even before the false doctrines were concocted, the influence of the Bible in every sphere of life down through the centuries. There can be no doubt but the Bible is not an ordinary book, not even an exceptional book, but it is the word of God as it claims to be.

The Inescapable Conclusion

That being so, it is authoritative and man is accountable to God by the things revealed in the Bible. The Bible tells us from

whence all things came, even man, why we are here, how we are to live while here, and where we are going. It gives us hope for eternity and the guiding light for life. The revelation of the Scriptures will be that by which we shall all be judged in the last day. Thanks be to God that He so loved us to give us His word, that we have it, that we can learn it, believe it, obey it, and enjoy the blessings of God that are revealed in it.

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Are Miracles Reasonable?

Most people like to consider themselves as being reasonable, rational, intelligent people. In reading the life of Christ we find ourselves reading of many miracles, such as Jesus walking on water, turning water to wine, stilling the tempest, feeding the thousands, healing the sick, casting out demons and even raising the dead. Not only in the life of Christ but in the Old Testament and many places in the New Testament we read of miracles worked by prophets, apostles and others. They are presented as historical records of actual happenings. We ask, "Is it reasonable to believe these accounts are true and accurate?"

Let us be impressed with the seriousness of this question. Many deny the miraculous. There are those who say they would like to be a disciple of Christ of whom the Bible speaks but they cannot accept the records of the miracles. If the reports of the miracles are not reliable, how can we accept anything else written therein to be reliable? If they are not true, does not this place every other revelation of the Bible suspect? But on the other hand, if the records of the miracles are true, is it not reasonable to contend for the credibility of the Scriptures in all other teachings? What we are contending has to do with the matter of authority, inerrancy, infallibility, reliability and credibility of the Bible. As we shall note later, it even involves more than just these matters.

Definition

Just what is a miracle? Sometimes a miracle is erroneously defined as simply something wonderful, marvelous, sensational,

exceptional, mysterious or something that happens for which a knowledgeable explanation cannot be offered. People call everything from escaping injury in an automobile accident to winning a football game a miracle. But such definitions miss the mark. A miracle is an interference with nature by supernatural power. Supernatural is the key word in discussing miracles. Something other than nature and its laws operate. It is above and beyond the laws of nature. A good definition of a miracle is, "God steps in and operates in ways contrary to what one expects in nature."

Four Attitudes

There are four attitudes toward miracles, three of which are skeptical of them. Miracles are called superstitions of primitive people. People like Abraham, Moses and even Paul and Luke were primitive in their thinking, naive and superstitious, according to some. What they could not understand and rationalize they called a miracle for want of a better explanation, we are told. But as you read about these men, you soon see they were exceptionally intelligent, well informed, competent people and far from being outmoded. Even today their writings are superior. Miracles cannot be brushed aside as reports by a primitive and superstitious people.

Some say the records are deliberate deceptions. Again, many thing can be said about the Biblical writers, but dishonesty is not an accusation that will stand. They were people of the highest ethical standards rather than deceivers.

Some say the miracles are merely legends that have grown through the years. Nothing but stories that were enlarged until gradually they were said to be historical records of the miraculous. But these accounts were not developed over long periods of time. Eyewitnesses, on the spot reporting, people of the time and place saw, heard, and knew these events first hand. They were not conveying "hand-me-down" stories.

Others say the records of the miracles are actual historical reports of real events. Of course, this is what the Bible contends, and we contend for the Bible. But is this a reasonable explanation? In the words of Isaiah, "*Come, let us reason together.*"

Why Miracles?

Why were miracles performed? Read John 3:2; 20:30; Hebrews 2:3,4; Mark 16:19,20; Acts 2:22 and learn that miracles were performed to prove the claims of Jesus, prove and verify the very message that the apostles taught, showing that Christ was approved of God and that the truth was being spoken by them. Now we have to admit that it is reasonable for one who claims to be the Son of God to provide something as evidence of His claim. Jesus did that. It is unreasonable to think that He would expect people to accept what He said without any evidence that it was true. We would have to contend that it is reasonable to expect miracles whether they ever occurred or not? But we believe they occurred.

What is the nature of a miracle? As we have noted, it is a supernatural event. Miracles were not done to be freakish, capricious, for show, entertainment or anything such thing, but always constructive in nature and for the promotion of good. Even when there was the destruction of something evil, this was for the good. Miracles were designed to do something, not just display something. They were designed to exhibit the character of God and teach His truth. They are always established by witnesses, often large numbers of them.

In working miracles, God is often simply doing something quickly and on a smaller scale that He does through nature all the time. The feeding of the thousands (five and four thousand) from five loaves and two fishes or seven loaves and a few fishes, was miraculous. But we must remember that God provides through natural laws all the food mankind eats anyway. He does this in thousands of fields year after year, as the farmer sows and reaps the harvest and the food is purchased and distributed.

All healing is "divine healing" inasmuch as God heals. But the healings recorded in Scripture were done contrary to what nature provides. It is not unreasonable to think that God, who created the entire universe, would have the ability to intervene if and when He so chose. Surely, the One who set the laws of nature in motion has the power to regulate them, speed them up, disregard them, slow them down, or whatever He may decide to do. Considering the power of God, miracles are not unreasonable.

Are They Reasonable?

The explanation and reasonableness for miracles is found in the first verse of the Bible. "*In the beginning God...*" Once one

has accepted the reality of God nothing else recorded in the Bible concerning God is difficult to accept. Men cannot go beyond three words into the Bible before they disagree over the basic foundation. In fact, some now even deny there was a beginning, but most are not so foolish. Science and experience shows that something does not come from nothing. Everything is the result of a cause. It had a beginning. The Bible says that God existed before anything else was and attributes the power for the existence of all things to God. The Bible does not set out to prove the existence of God, but begins with the premise that God is. The Bible reveals God. Nonetheless, evidences are found throughout the Bible for the existence of God, which is another deserving theme from our present one. But from the front to back, the Bible declares, *"I am that I am."*

Once you admit the all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present, eternal God, the rest of the Bible presents no difficulty. The evidence for the existence of God is overwhelmingly one-sided. It would be unreasonable to think that God could not do such things as the miracles recorded in the Bible. Therefore, the reasonableness of miracles reduces itself to belief in God and His existence. It is absurd to believe in God and deny the creation, which was a miracle.

God Is

The existence of God is proved by the law of cause and effect. Is it reasonable to believe that this massive, immense, intricate universe just somehow accidentally happened? The probability of such a thing is totally impossible and such cannot even be mathematically expressed. That nothing was and something just happened and produced this universe is the most unreasonable and absurd explanation mind can feature. Matter is not eternal. We are not so foolish as to contend a building just happened, or a car just happened, or a watch just happened. How ridiculous for people to contend that nothing existed but something happened and here we are.

Some have taught that the earth was thrown off the sun. There is no evidence for this, but when you want to deny God, evidence is not important. Even so, where did the sun come from? You still have not eliminated the existence of God. It was a right powerful and wise sun that had the capacity to provide what this earth provides with just a throw off!

We are told that all living things, plant and animal, came from

a single living cell that somehow evolved and over the eons of time we have come to the point we are now. It is not yet determined what we might become. One of the biggest lies perpetrated on an otherwise educated society is the contention that organic evolution that says all living things have evolved from a single cell is a fact. It is not a fact, and not even a remote possibility. Scientific fact proves evolution impossible. Yet, in the frantic search for something other than God before whom we live and to whom we must give account, the lie of evolution is taught as a fact. We need only ask where did the original cell come from to show how unreasonable is the denial of God. Evolutionary theory not only denies God, but denies the Bible, denies scientific fact, denies every decent and worthy virtue in the world. But most evolutionists deny the existence of God anyway.

The complexity, design, plan, pattern and system of our universe proves the existence of a supreme mind, designer and planner of it. From the microscopic to the expanse of outer space, there is evidence of intelligence behind it all. The events of space probing so prominent today can be accomplished only because of the precision of the operation of this universal and colossal accident or explosion, as some explain. All the design has no purpose behind it at all, some say. That is what the deniers of God would have us believe. Such is most unreasonable.

The One Explanation

The only reasonable explanation for the existence of the universe is the reality of God. The reality of God makes belief in miracles reasonable.

Christianity was founded upon the miraculous. There is no such thing as a non-miraculous Christianity. The way of hope, life, salvation, peace, joy, eternity in heaven and all else is founded on the miraculous. God stepped in, doing for man what man could not do for himself. The incarnation of Jesus was a miracle. His perfect life was a miracle. The affirmation and confirmation of His teaching was accomplished through miracles. No faith rests so completely on the reasonableness of miracles as does the faith authored by Christ. Nothing is more reasonable than the miraculous because nothing is more reasonable than the contention that God is.

The age of miracles has come and gone. There is neither the

need for them, nor do those endued with such power survive today. The fact that miracles are not being performed today says nothing against the power of God. God does not have to keep proving and proving and proving His power nor His Word. That has been done and has been confirmed and we are expected to accept it on the basis of testimony that cannot and will not be shaken by the theories and philosophies of the "wise" men of this world.

We confidently say to one and all, let no man shake your faith in the records of God's operations as recorded in Scripture by the appeal that they are unreasonable. The testimony, evidence and proof of the reasonable of miracles is on the side of historical reality.

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Why Some Quit the Church

We begin by noting that there is a difference between a reason and an excuse. An excuse is designed to release one from his duty without revealing the real truth behind the desire for release. A reason seeks release but tells the truth as to why. A Christian should never have either an excuse or a reason for wanting to forsake his duty to Christ and the church. It is a sad thing that some do quit.

Many offer excuses why they never become Christians, such as, they are too bad, or they are good enough, too young, too old, can't hold out, intend to someday, too many hypocrites in the church, etc. The real reason is that they do not love the Son of God and do not have sufficient faith to lead them to obey.

Some are very much against the church and offer as their excuse such things as the church being too narrow-minded, intolerant, hypocritical, old fashioned, etc. The real reason is that they are untaught, or prejudiced, determined to go their own way, unsubmissive to God's truth, misinformed and closed of mind. Why should anyone ever decide to go to hell because of somebody else?

Still others who have become members of the church will quit. Peter shows the tragedy of those who turn back in Second Peter

2:20-22. They offer such excuses as too sick, too tired, too busy, have to work, transportation, first one thing then another, excuses that never keep them from doing anything else they want to do. But the excuses do not reveal the real reasons. In this lesson we want to discuss four reasons behind their quitting. There are others than these four that we could also examine.

Shall We Stand?

Some who quit do not like the stand for the truth that the church must take. What they refuse to accept is the fact that the church does not determine what ought to be upheld. Christ has determined that and revealed that in His word. Brethren only have to decide whether to obey Christ or not.

Many brethren really resist the church taking the Lord's side regarding worldliness. The cares of this world have choked out their love for the Lord. They want the things of this life so much that they will sacrifice Christ in order to have them. They are too steeped in ungodly living and do not wish to give that up. They resent the church teaching against drinking, dancing, smoking, immodesty, gambling, dishonesty, gossiping, etc. because those things are part of their lives and they refuse to abandon them. They do not like the condemnation of the evil, sex-crazed movies, television shows, literature and magazines because they watch them, read them, subscribe to them and enjoy them.

They do not like the church to take God's stand on marriage, divorce and remarriage because they, or someone they know, have become involved in sinful situations from which they have no intentions of leaving.

They do not like to hear the church present lessons on attendance at worship, or cheerful and liberal giving, putting God first, because that interferes with their sports, their fun, their vacations, their popularity and pleasure and having more possessions. When the truth gets in the way of what they want they feel uncomfortable and had rather not have to hear about it, so they quit.

The question that Paul once asked, "*Am I your enemy because I tell you the truth?*" must be answered, "Yes," by many who quit the church. Nobody becomes more agitated and resentful toward truth than church members who wish the other brethren would tone down the condemnation of sin and the proclamation of Christian duties.

Not Quite Quitters

Some do not quit entirely, but they drag their feet, complaining always against faithful brethren who stand for God's word, finding fault with every exposure of their sins, attacking the messengers of truth because they cannot handle the message of truth. They have the foolish idea that they can ride two horses at the same time even though they are going in opposite directions.

Some others, who do not quit altogether and do not complain out loud, choose the route of inconsistency and hypocrisy, pretending to follow Christ but resenting every step of the way. They are all diseased with the dislike of the church standing for the truth, which is the what the church must do.

Some have been known to quit because they do not like somebody else who is a member. It may be an elder, the preacher, somebody, anybody. We ought to make sure that whoever and whatever we dislike is based on the Scripture rather than on personalities, peculiarities, opinions and personal enmity. Scriptural problems can be resolved by scriptural processes. Why should anyone take out their dislike of another against God and turn on Him?

Who Suffers?

Who is hurt the most when someone quits? Is it the person who is not liked, or the person who quits? The one who quits is on his way to hell regardless of how ugly somebody else may be. What could be worse than eternal condemnation? Salvation is faithfulness in Christ whether you like somebody else or not. Disloyalty on my part to Christ does not change the essentiality of faithfulness. Letting somebody else, especially somebody we do not like, keep us out of heaven is foolishness gone to seed.

If ever you consider quitting the Lord's church because of some of the members, you better consider who gets hurt. Do you realize who you are offending? True, everyone is hurt when anyone quits a faithful church. But never does the failure, fault, or weakness of somebody else give you sufficient justification to neglect your sacred duty to God.

Keep before us the words of Jesus, *"No man, having put his hand to the plow and looking back is fit for the kingdom of heaven."* (Luke 9:62).

An Avenue of Apostasy

Some quit because they marry outside the church and under that influence they lose their zeal to be faithful to it. I am aware that there are many people who have married non-Christians who have not only remained faithful themselves but have converted their mates. If this be your case, be thankful it turned out that way. You are the exception, not the rule. Those who have studied the matter tell us that seven out of ten who marry outside the church eventually leave the church. We have known many, many people who have gone that deadly path. Only a small percentage ever converts their mates.

Many children are lost to the cause of Christ because only one of their parents cared for the Lord's church. The other did not. The children were torn in frustration and confusion and did nothing for the Lord. There is not an adequate way to express the heartache and trouble that has come into the hearts of many brethren because they married outside the church.

Many who marry non-Christians do not leave the church but they become rather bland and shy regarding the truth. They do not stand as they once did. They are prone to compromise and minimize truth in favor of their mates. They are often so critical of the church because the church must take the Lord's position which the non-Christian resents. Homes that are divided religiously may have a degree of happiness now and then, but they can never be what God wants the home to be because Christ does not reign supreme in that home, even at the top.

One of the leading causes for the apostasy of Israel was that they married those outside of God's family and people. This polluted their thinking and their faith suffered. Even though repeatedly warned against it, they persisted in it and it brought their ruin. These things were written for our learning, but many just will not learn.

Marrying one who shares your faith is a safeguard against apostasy. How can people do this thing to themselves and their children they may have? Do they care only for themselves that they leave out God from their marriage? Here is the closest human relationship on earth, and God is omitted. We need all the encouragement we can get to live life faithfully. How contrary to good sense to deliberately place the added burden against yourself by entering a marriage with one who does not put Christ first in life!

We do not apologize for denouncing mixed marriages. If you

had seen as much trouble in the lives of others because of such things that most preachers see, you would not see it any other way than the way we have presented it.

Did They Really Start?

Some quit because they may never have really started. They were not converted. They went through a form for some motive, but their heart was not changed. They became a member like somebody joining a club. They held reservations in their mind even as they verbalized their professed convictions. They became a member to please somebody else rather than the Lord. They did not really obey God, but had other motives for doing what they did. Maybe they were misled by over-zealous "soul winners" who did not teach them sufficiently, and when they did come to understand the true cost of being a Christian they melted away. We would not pretend to judge their hearts, but these things are matters of reality with some.

Nothing short of genuine commitment to the cause of Christ will please God. Somebody has said that nobody can be sure just who really belongs to God. We do not subscribe to this view because by the word of truth we can tell who is and who is not a Christian. Being unable, however, to judge another's heart, we may be deceived regarding some. But God knows the hearts of all people. We can tell, as far as outward appearance is concerned, who is indicating faithfulness, but what the inward man is we leave to God. When a person comes to be baptized we ask them if they believe that Christ is the Son of God. Only God knows if they are telling the truth when they say they do. We have to accept what we are told because we are not judges of another's heart. Whether one has really been converted to Christ is between them and God. We can know if we are saved. We may not be one hundred per cent sure of all others. But we must insist that they do what they do in compliance with God's commands, not only outwardly, but inwardly. We can determine the outward, and leave the inward to God and the person involved. Evidently some have gone through the motions outwardly but it becomes evident later that their motives were not as they should have been. They turned away.

This is not to say that all those who fall away never were really converted, as the Baptists erroneously teach. People can fall away and leave that which they once truly and obediently accepted. But some have seemingly fallen away from what they

appeared to accept because they either were not aware of what was expected, or really never accepted it from the heart. There is difference in being “wetted” in baptism and being “wedded” to the Lord.

Same End

Regardless of why some quit the church, his soul is lost. Does it really matter why one quits when the result is hell in every case? Whatever be the provocation and temptation to quit God, it is folly to do so. Let nothing cause you to quit His church as it strives to continue faithful. You be faithful to Him in His body. Salvation will never be enjoyed in heaven any other way.

† † † † †

Christ and His Kingdom

It is obvious to the Bible student that this subject is so extensive that one must confine himself to certain portions of it at a time. We shall center our attention on when His kingdom began, hoping that this information will enhance our respect and appreciation for it and understand its place in God's scheme of man's redemption.

The term “kingdom” is used in two senses, even though it speaks of the same institution. It is the church, here and now (Colossians 1:13). It is also the future existence of those in the church, the eternal abode in heaven (Acts 14:22). It is never used with reference to some earthly kingdom with Christ as an earthly king reigning in Jerusalem for a thousand years.

The kingdom, or church, has always been in God's plan. In Ephesians 3:11 Paul explains how God directed him to preach to the Gentiles, who had previously been excluded from the covenants, and how they would be made equal with Jews in receiving the offer of salvation. The existence of the kingdom was evidence of God's wisdom and was according to God's eternal purpose. As a building is evidence of the wisdom of an architect and builder, so the church is evidence of God's wisdom in saving mankind. This plan existed in the mind of God “*before the foundation of the world.*” (Ephesians 1:4). As a painting existed in the mind of an artist before being put on canvass, so

the church was in the mind of God before it became a reality.

Old Testament

In both the Old and New Testaments we read of prophecies of the coming of this kingdom. Daniel 2 tells of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of an image with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, and legs of iron with feet a mixture of iron and clay. He saw a stone "*not made with hands*" smite the image and break it into pieces and grow throughout the world.

Daniel interpreted that dream as five kingdoms. The first was the Babylonian, then the Persian, Grecian and Roman empires. The fifth, the stone, was the kingdom of the Lord to be established during the days of the fourth kingdom (Daniel 2:44).

Again in Daniel, chapter seven, Daniel saw a vision of one like unto the Son of man coming to the Ancient of Days in the clouds and receiving a kingdom. When one reads Acts 1:8,9 he sees the fulfillment of this prophetic vision with the ascension of Christ in the clouds to the "*right hand of God*" and being given His kingdom where He now reigns from heaven, which is His throne (Acts 7:49).

Isaiah two contains a prophecy of when the kingdom would come and where it would be established. People were going to the mountain of God, the house of God, which was the kingdom of God, the church of God (First Timothy 3:15). The word of the Lord would go forth from Jerusalem and include all nations. These things would take place in the "*last days*," the last age (Hebrews 1:1,2). The fulfillment of these things is recorded in Acts two.

Acts two is also the record of the fulfillment of Joel two when Joel prophesied of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days. Peter said of the events on Pentecost, "*This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.*" (Acts 2:16).

From these Old Testament prophecies, and many others that could be cited, we learn that the kingdom would come in the days of the kingdom which corresponds to the Roman empire. It would come after the ascension of Christ into heaven. It would begin in the last days at the city of Jerusalem, accompanied by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and would extend to all nations of people.

New Testament

In the New Testament, closer to the time of the beginning, we hear John the Baptist preaching that the kingdom was “at hand.” (Matthew 3:1). “At hand” means nearby, soon to be, nigh upon us. Jesus taught the same thing (Matthew 4:17). When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray He taught them to pray for the kingdom to come (Matthew 6:10). (Billy Graham contends this prayer was never answered, at least, not yet.) Jesus commissioned His disciples to preach the same message and He also taught that it would come with power in the lifetime of some of His hearers (Mark 9:1). This power is identified as the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). Jesus promised, even after the death of John the Baptist, that He would build His kingdom (Matthew 16:16-18), where the words kingdom and church are used interchangeably. He taught how a nobleman would go away and receive his kingdom before returning (Luke 19:11ff), and applied the teaching to Himself.

The Lord’s Supper was instituted by Christ and His disciples were taught He would not commune with them again in this manner until in the kingdom (Mark 14:25). We read of apostolic instructions to partake of the Lord’s Supper in First Corinthians eleven when Paul wrote members of the church to observe that supper. This proves the kingdom had come by the time Paul wrote, and that the kingdom and the church are one and the same institution.

After the resurrection of Jesus Christ He stated that repentance and remission of sins would be preached in His name beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47ff). This would occur when power came upon the apostles. Having already learned that the power would be the Holy Spirit, we read of the coming of the Holy Spirit on the apostles on the day of Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem and they preached repentance and remission of sins in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38).

Those who took down the body of Jesus from the cross still waited even at that time for the kingdom (Mark 15:43), which proves the kingdom had not yet come at the time of His burial. Acts 1:6 shows His disciples were still looking for the kingdom just prior to His ascension, which proves the kingdom did not come until after His resurrection and ascension.

Its Beginning

Acts two records the coming of the Holy Spirit, in the city of Jerusalem, in the last days, in the days of the Roman empire,

after His ascension, with the message being preaching that Jesus said was to be preached. All of it was happening in the lifetime of some who had heard Jesus preach. Everything foretold in both the Old and New Testaments came to pass that day regarding the establishment of His kingdom. Beginning with Acts two the kingdom is in existence, and people are said to become members of it, observing the Lord's Supper in it. Not one thing that was prophesied in this matter of the beginning of the kingdom was lacking. Therefore, from Scripture, we must conclude that the kingdom had its beginning (Acts 11:15) on the first Pentecost after the Lord's return to heaven.

Why is this so important to me and you? We need to understand that God has not changed His mind nor altered His promises and prophecies. He did not go back on His word of prophecy. The kingdom came and now exists. God kept His word. Salvation is in His kingdom rather than in the devil's domain. The terms of entrance into the kingdom are the same conditions for salvation. When one hears, believes and obeys the gospel he become a citizen in the kingdom of God. Those in the kingdom have been *"delivered out of the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of His dear Son."* (Colossians 1:13). They are also in the church.

Someday, according to God's wisdom and good pleasure, the Son shall return to claim His own, and those in the kingdom shall be delivered up to the Father into eternal glory (First Corinthians 15:24; First Thessalonians 4:13-18).

Illustration

Permit a brief illustration. Should one wish to become a citizen of the United States, what is the process?. He must first recognize he is not a citizen. He must want to become a citizen. Having heard of the land, he must comply with the laws of this country whereby, when he obeys them, he is given citizenship.

The same principle is true in leaving the kingdom of the devil and entering the kingdom of Christ. We must recognize we are alienated from Him because of our sins. We must desire to be a citizen of His kingdom. We must comply with the terms of entrance into His kingdom, which are faith, repentance, confession of Christ, and burial in water in the name of Christ for the remission of sins. One is then added to the church (Acts 2:47), is born again (John 3:3-5), and is given citizenship into the kingdom composed of the redeemed.

(from page 24)

As should be the case with all good citizens, we must remain faithful to the King. Here is the importance of the matter of the beginning of the kingdom and how one enters it. What was taught in the first century regarding it is still true today. What was heard, believed and obeyed must be heard, believed and obeyed now. What was given then will be given the obedient now.

† † † † †

A New Work Began July First

After four very pleasant years with the Rock Island church here in Warren County, I began "full time" work with the East End church of McMinnville last July. I leave Rock Island with the highest regard for its eldership and membership. My work there permitted me to preach in many gospel meetings and those brethren have been exceedingly good to us and loyal to the truth. I can heartily commend the Rock Island congregation as a sound church and wonderful Christians.

While the arrangements at East End will limit the number of meetings for each year to five, I look forward to working with the brethren there. The opportunity and possibilities for the future look bright. Pray for us all.

* * * * *

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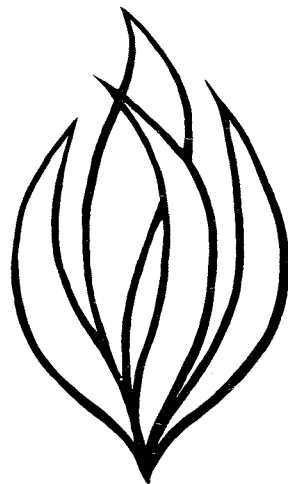
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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Where Did We Come From?

The material of this discussion has been and will continue to be a battleground for believers in God. The question asked receives two very opposite answers. One, we came from God, the Creator. Two, we are the result of accidental chance and materialistic evolution.

Bible Answer

The Bible answer is clear. *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."* (Genesis 1:1). *"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them."* (Genesis 1:26,27). *"And God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul."* (Genesis 2:7). *"And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man."* (Genesis 2:22). *"For in him we live and move and have our very being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring."* (Acts 17:28). The Biblical answer is plain and simple. God created man, then woman. God gave him a body, breathed life into him, gave him a spirit in His own image. Man is a body, soul and spirit.

Evolution's Answer

Contrary to the Biblical answer is the evolutionist's contention that all form of life on earth today came from one lowly form and this development was gradual and altogether by natural means, nothing supernatural about it. Evolution is sometimes presented as the "man from monkey" doctrine. But actually it is the theory that man, monkey and everything else that lives, plant and animal, came from a single primitive cell through the process of naturalistic evolution. We are told that life came from dead matter, and that mind and spirit came from a mindless and spiritless universe.

Evolutionists explain, "The most striking phenomenon in biological evolution is the emergence of mind out of apparently mindless universe." Darwin pointed out that no supernatural

designer was needed since natural selection could account for any known form of life. The earth, evolutionists say, was not created, but evolved, as did the animals and plants that inhabit it, including humans, minds, souls and everything else.

When asked to explain the origin of life, evolutionists offer no explanation but hold to "spontaneous life," life that somehow just came into being accidentally. According to this doctrine (spontaneous generation) many species of animals were supposed to arise spontaneously from non-living matter. For example, insects were believed to originate from dew, frogs and toads from the muddy bottom of ponds under the influence of the sun, skippers from cheese, and fly maggots from flesh. Even now, life might conceivably arise anew from non-living matter if the various elements contained in protoplasm were to unite in the proper quantities and in the proper relationships to one another. While the principle of organic evolution (supposedly) accounts for the great variety of plant and animal life, how the first living things came into existence is not explained. But often today evolutionists take a stab at origins and contend that something happened in the midst of nothing accidentally and "BANG!"

Until such a theory can be demonstrated and proven, it is a lie to contend that evolution is a scientific fact. Nonetheless, the lie is being propagated everywhere that everything came into being without intent, design, plan, purpose, no God, no intellect, only some unexplained explosion from something that did not exist and from that somehow life eventually arose and evolution took place and here we are.

Evolution and Science

Evolutionists claim their position is supported by scientific discoveries, but the very opposite is true. The Biblical viewpoint is not unscientific and contradicts no known scientific law and demonstrable action. We all are aware of the great strides in the field of science and science is not deserving of ridicule. The facts of science are not disputed. But the contention that science supports this evolutionary theory is nothing but an unproven and unprovable assertion. Science does not support evolution. What man has been able to prove runs contrary to the claims and essentials of the evolutionary theory. Repeatedly, the findings in archeology, anthropology, geology, biology, zoology, paleontology, psychology and physiology are friends of the

Biblical record of creation. It is a lie to say otherwise.

Two Areas

Two areas where evolutionists have leaned heavily for support is in the fields of paleontology, the study of fossils, and geology, the study of rocks. The study of fossils is the study of the remains of living creatures preserved in stone, petrified, hard parts of animals, imprints, tracks, etc. in stone. Such a study does not present the gradual evolution from one level of life to another, from one kind of life to another. The opposite is found; namely, the coming into existence of life, fully developed and mature, already divided into various parts and kinds. Paleontology has reversed some of the sequences of development that evolutionists once said were proven fact. Paleontology furnishes conclusive refutation of the Darwinian theory.

The geologic record does not conform to the demands of uniformitarianism which denies the supernatural, even such catastrophies as the Noahic flood. It contends that everything has developed, and is still developing, along the same lines and laws as always. But the layers of the earth have caused havoc among the evolutionists because what is found in the rocks just does not fit the evolutionist's theories, contradicts them, but never contradicts the Biblical record.

One used to hear quite a lot about the expectancy of the discovery of the "missing link." In fact, some evolutionists were so obsessed with finding it that they invented it with fraudulent "finds" which were the work of their own hands. Not only are there "missing links," there has not even yet been found evidence of the chain they say must exist. It takes gullible and naive faith, not faith based on evidence, to believe in that theory. Such links as the Java Man, Piltdown Man, Cor-magnon Man, and others have all been proven to be no missing link at all. They are nothing but a few scraps of bones here and there from which theorists have "created" the entire creature they suppose once had those few bones. One such "missing link" turned out to be nothing but the knee cap of an elephant, once proclaimed as the skull of pre-historic man.

One thing science has proven in the laboratories and that is that like produces like. But this is what the Bible says (Genesis 1:11,12,20-25). Each plant, animal and human produces after its own kind. Science has never been able to present the evidence to support transitions from one kind to another. The

first undisputed traces of animal life which appear exhibit the same distinctions as now exist. They were formed in the remote ages into groups apparently as distinct from one another as they are at the present time. This is truly a great fact that has been a source of marked perplexity to those who hold the view of evolution. Several noted geologists have spent considerable parts of their professional careers seeking some evidence of living forms in the pre-Cambrian strata. After some eighty years of search, this effort must be said to show a singular lack of success. Darwin himself admitted, in the book, *Life and Letters of Charles Darwin*, "When we descend to details we can prove that not one species has changed." As to the explanation of evolution, Darwin said, "At present no satisfactory direct answer can be given." Things have not changed regarding this matter.

Evolutionist's Futility

Several attempts have been made to explain how evolution works. Some have said natural selection, mutations, both of which have been generally discarded because experience shows that both tend to harm and lower the forms of life rather than elevate and raise them to higher and more sophisticated forms that evolution demands.

Similarities between various levels of life does not prove a common organic origin, nor disprove the creation by God. Similarities might well be expected since God created all things. Similarities tend to show a common creator rather than a common fleshly ancestor.

The lack of evidence on the side of evolution is noteworthy. Especially is it noteworthy since books, programs, articles and speeches are constantly being produced that claim evolution is a foregone conclusion. It just is not the truth. Those who debate the issue are finding it more and more difficult to defend the evolutionary contention and refuse to do so more often than accept the challenge. In fact, few debaters of the matter can be found that will openly defend evolution under the critical eye of investigation. They promote their cause through insistence, smug sophistication, intellectual dishonesty and ridicule of whatever does not suit their views.

What is even more damaging to evolution is the inability to explain how mind sprang into being and how dead matter produced life. Never has this been demonstrated and everything science knows shows such cannot be. Science is limited to

working with what exists, anyway, and cannot deal with origins.

A constant thorn in the flesh of atheists is the question, "From whence came the first cell?" They say it just happened, somehow, sometime, accidentally and life just popped into being from a naturalistic combination and from that has come everything, absolutely everything that lives on earth today. For men who are often otherwise intelligent to accept such irrational schemes is amazing. It is impossible that it could happen by chance. It cannot even be mathematically expressed the odds are so tremendous. But not only the first chance happening, but all the millions of other "beneficial chance events" that would had to have occurred for things to be as they are. Evolution is just totally absurd. One could more readily believe that a wristwatch was the result of an explosion in the junk yard than to believe the evolution doctrine.

Can You Believe It?

Some years ago while watching a scientific explanation on the origin of life, a reporter, Frank McGee, laid this one before his hearers, and he did it seriously as if it was supposed to make sense. Once upon a time this earth (the origin of which was not explained) was visited by creatures from outer space (their origin was not explained). But these creatures found the climate of earth not to their liking (I have seen places like this, myself). So they packed up and went home. but leaving behind some of their garbage. That word "garbage" is the word the reporter used. From that "garbage" life began to emerge and evolve and here we are today, the result of some very talented trash. I know some people are trashy but how could anyone present such "garbage" on national television in good conscience? Yet, it was done and done as a viable explanation of life on earth. Evidence? None! But evidence is something those who deny God do not realize they should have.

It is evident that this immense, huge, complex, intricate and precise universe has a purpose, meaning, designer, planner and was brought into being by some intelligence. Chance is no explanation whatever for the existence of things, nor the existence of man. To contend for long spans of time and chance is nothing but to "cop out." It is no explanation at all.

Intimidation

We are told that most scientists accept evolution, and this may be true. It is also true that more and more competent scientists are denouncing evolution as the absurdity it is. We may live long enough to see the day when the theory is as antiquated as the square earth theory. The reason most scientists are evolutionists is because only one side of the evidence is taught them in the institutions of learning and their colleagues and professors make no bones about it. You are uneducated and ignorant if you question them. The so-called "wise men" of the world once thought the world was flat also. Hardly any science book of even a few years ago is credible today. One thing is certainly evolving, changing, shifting, never standing still, and that is the "facts of science." It is the height of arrogance and pride to turn the back against creationism when the evidence is not even compared. Evolution is neither a science nor knowledge, but falsely called science, or pseudo-science (First Timothy 6:20).

In our increasingly humanistic and secular society people are intimidated if they believe the Biblical record or even believe in God. The "wise men" are making fools of millions as well as themselves. We stand without reservation on the position that believing that God created this world and all things therein makes far more sense, fits the evidence, and gives more substance to existence than any evolutionary theory whether it be branded atheistic, agnostic, theistic or whatever. No explanation is more rational, scientifically compatible, logical, believable then, *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."*

Many would be shocked at how many clergymen have compromised the truth of the God they claim to serve and have opted for evolution in order to be considered acceptable. But if all people everywhere should deny the truth, does that change it? Truth is truth and will remain so!

† † † † †

(from page 17)

How far removed from truth some have gone!

But the truth that Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, was born of the virgin Mary still stands. We believe it and preach it and urge all brethren to be faithful and true to this truth and the evidences God has given to sustain it.

† † † † †

Enemies of the Cross

“Brethren be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. [For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.” (Philippians 3:17-19).

As astounding as it might sound to the faithful child of God, there are those who choose to be enemies of the cross. History tells us of events in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries called the Crusades. They were certainly not Christian in the Biblical sense of the word. They were a fanatical series of military conflicts between “Christian” Europe and the Mohammedan world for control of Palestine. In Europe, where Catholicism ruled and placed such emphasis on relics, the “Christians” wanted possession of what some considered to be the greatest relic of all, the “Holy Land,” and sought to deliver it from those they considered to be enemies of the cross.

The result was several military efforts, each with declining success, to capture and control Palestine, liquidate all enemies and infidels, whether Jewish or Mohammedan, all heretics (which meant anybody who questioned papal domination and authority).

None Were Friends

There is no question that the Jews and Mohammedans are enemies of the cross of Christ, but neither is there any doubt that those who instigated and executed these Crusades were not Christians as the Bible teaches. Such warfare is not the way that Christianity is to advance.

Jesus once said, *“My kingdom is not of this world.”* (John 18:36). Paul wrote, *“[For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds...]”* (Second Corinthians 10:4). Ephesians 6:12 gives the Christian armor and it is not one for a literal, carnal warfare, but a spiritual warfare.

The cross of Christ had enemies in the past and has had them all along. The first enemies of which we read were Jews. With fair means or foul, legal or illegal, they tried to silence the

message of Christianity. Even from within the church came the digressions of Judaizing teachers who falsely preached that Gentiles, in order to come to Christ, must accept the law of Moses. They attempted to bind circumcision and other matters as part of the faith of Christ (Acts 15:1; Galatians 5:1-4). They attributed salvation to the works of the law rather than the system of grace, faith, blood, obedience and the law of Christ that was purchased by the blood of Christ. Paul said such were perverting the gospel (Galatians 1:7).

Paganism

Pagans and heathens and their idolatrous gods are enemies of the cross of Christ. Any religion that teaches there is more than one Deity (Godhead) is an enemy of the cross of Christ. In Athens, Paul said, *"For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, To The Unknown God. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands..."* (Acts 17:23,24). But they mocked the truth that he preached (Acts 17:32).

It is a wonder that Christianity, the cross of Christ, has survived through the ages seeing the intense hatred and enmity that has been raised against it from every side from its infancy until now.

Isms

Enemies of the cross have arisen through the years of ecclesiastical history. There are vicious, potent and diabolical enemies now. Modernism, atheism, secular humanism are the most deadly facing the truth today. These philosophies deny everything the Christian cites as authority. They reject the Bible, the Deity of Christ, life after death, the existence of God, miracles, the virgin birth, the spirit of man, the resurrection of Jesus, the efficacy of His blood, whatever.

Such enemies wage their warfare on many fronts, such as pseudo-science in the educational institutions, textbooks, television programs, political forums, even in seminaries and churches that claim to respect Christ.

Denominationalism has long been an enemy of the cross even though they claim to be a friend. Faithful brethren have

done battle against denominationalism, and though some are now compromising God's truth to "go along and get along" with denominations for the sake of peace, faithful brethren still combat the denominational menace.

Denominationalism causes and feeds upon division, confusion and chaos, creating waste, doubt with creeds and churches of men rather than of God. The denominational world has done more than Darwin, Marx or anyone else in paving the way for the advance of atheism and humanism. It has sown the seeds into the hearts of generation after generation that it does not matter what one believes just so long as honesty and sincerity prevails. They have adopted names, doctrines, theories, theologies, philosophies, etc. that are contrary to what God has revealed in His Word, and the result is that more and more people wonder if the Bible is from God at all.

The clergymen of denominations have much for which to give answer before God in judgment for promoting their religions which are departures from the word of truth.

We have already referred to moralism and humanism, but more needs to be said. Humanism contends that "man is the most" and there is no need for God, or any god. It denies there is absolute truth and standards. It is the preacher of "do your own thing" religion and life. While it calls for "morality," it destroys any possibility for a standard of morality. If there is no God, whose standard is to be followed?

It is somewhat ironical that the very position of humanism, denying right and wrong and rejecting God, laughing at the Bible, ridiculing life after death, has destroyed any basis, reason, motive or purpose in being what they call good and moral. If humanism is right, nothing matters whatever. Sin, hell, heaven, righteousness are not realities and make no difference if there is no way to determine which is which. We are not going anywhere anyway according to this teaching.

From Within

But not all enemies of the cross of Christ are outside the church. One deadly enemy is the division and schism that exists. While there is much religious division outside the church, the church bleeds internally for the same reason. One truth we need to understand is the following: those who cause trouble in the church are those who (1) teach false doctrines and practices, or (2) those who demand conformity to their opinions in matters of

opinion. Those who resist the invasion of false doctrines and false teachers, and who insist on allowing what God allows are not those who create havoc for the church. Error, not truth, causes division among brethren.

Division often reaches the point of bitterness, lying, back-stabbing, bad-mouthing, poisoned-penned brethren who will likely as not be big-name brethren, editors, college presidents, pulpit preachers even of big and prominent churches, attacking anybody who dare raises questions about what they say and do. Some of the most vicious diatribes that have been leveled against this writer has come from just such men, men who were compromising truth with error, diseased with "go-along-ism," teaching and practicing error, and who considered it an offense to even have what they said and did questioned and investigated in light of Scripture.

Self-Appointed Elite

We have in the church a "scholastic elite" who have been schooled in liberalism and modernism who have been pouring their errors into the church, even in schools where they teach as much as any other one source. The compromising religious politicians and liberal editors have aided and abetted them in their goal of restructuring the church to be more acceptable to the world. Their tactics include ridicule, intimidation, threats, lies and character assassination in order to promote their heresies.

Matters of opinion have rent the church asunder, such as the anti-orphan home and anti-cooperation hobbies. Matters of faith are issues in the church because some inject false doctrines, promoted through perverted "versions," false teachers fellow-shipped, digressive programs endorsed and advertised as if truth really no longer mattered. Why are not such things enemies of the cross?

This biting and devouring of one another is tearing the church apart. But there is no way to stop it until error is removed. The trouble today is that error has been so adopted in many churches that little can be done. The warnings against apostasy and the demand for authority for what is said, done and taught are being ignored in favor of what Brother Big or some "scholar" has decreed.

Worldliness and hypocrisy in the church is one, possibly the most potent, weapon against the cross in the devil's arsenal. Strange how Christians provide the devil with one of his most

powerful weapons! What better way to cause people to scoff at Christianity than to have the capacity to array a host of people who claim to be Christians but who are practicing the very things the Lord condemned and omitting what He commanded?

Some have refused to become Christian because of hypocrisy in the church. Of course, such people will not be excused from their duty to God. We cannot go to heaven on the sins of somebody else. But what a sad and distorted display so many present by the daily lives they lead while professing to be a Christian!

What To Do

But what can be done? To bemoan bad situations is not enough. Nothing will be done until another enemy, the enemy of lethargy, indifference and inaction, is removed from the hearts and lives of brethren. This "let-the-other-fellow-do-it" attitude has put many to sleep and they are content on the sidelines. "Spectator religion" is all they have. They just watch, but not participate! That is the way it is with many. The only time they get aroused is when somebody says they ought to act. They never speak up, stand up, or can be counted for truth.

The enemies of truth are sapping the strength from the church because members of the church are allowing them to do it. We have brached out into the fun, food and frolic fellowship with games, gyms, glamour and gimmicks and the sound, solid message of salvation has been dimmed in the process. So much of the church suffers because so many obviously take the lethargic and contemptible attitude, "So what?"

The goal of any who oppose the cross is to ultimately destroy it and its influence, whether intended or not. But in contrast to the emenies of the cross, there are those who are like Paul, *"But God forbid that I glory, save in the cross of out Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."* (Galatians 6:14).

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(from page 22)

The work of evangelism is the work of the child of God. May we each one concern ourselves with our primary task.

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The Virgin Birth of Christ

That Jesus was born of a virgin is a basic and fundamental cornerstone of the doctrine of Christ. While Christmas is not His birthday, neither is His birth a false and imaginary tale designed to exalt Jesus as modernists teach. Even though some contend that the birth of Christ does not matter whether Mary was a virgin or not, this is simply untrue. It does matter. To doubt it casts a bad reflection on the integrity of the Bible as well as question one of the God-given evidences of the Deity of Christ.

The birth of Jesus by a virgin demands the Deity of Jesus in the flesh. His Deity demands His authority. His authority demands man's obedience. Because men do not want to obey the way of Christ they somehow must dissolve the evidences of His position of authority and this demands the removal of evidences of His Deity. To remove such evidence requires them to attack the virgin birth of Jesus.

But one can no more be a faithful disciple of Christ and believe the Word of God while denying the virgin birth than one could deny the efficacy of His blood, resurrection, ascension, kingship, or any number of other fundamental truths regarding Jesus the Christ. The Scriptures address themselves to the virgin birth as one irrefutable evidence of His Deity and is an inspired presentation of His nature.

First Hint

The very first hint from God that He would redeem man contained the suggestion of the virgin birth. When God was speaking to Satan, Genesis 3:15, *"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed. It shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel."* God spoke of the seed of woman, not the seed of man and woman. She would produce a manchild (*"his heel,"* the ASV uses the pronoun *"he"* rather than *"it"*). Satan would inflict a wound against this manchild, but the child would inflict a mortal blow to Satan.

It was Jesus Christ that was afflicted and did afflict Satan. Science has long proven that it takes the seed of both male and female to produce a child. For a long time it was erroneously thought that the womb of woman only served as an incubator

for the seed of man. But now it is known that male sperm and female eggs must fuse in a process called fertilization. It takes both to produce a child. Yet, this passage suggests that the female egg would develop a manchild with no mention of fertilization of the male. The One of whom God spoke was to be the “seed of woman.”

Born of Woman

In God's good time Jesus was “born of woman” (Galatians 4:4). The woman that gave birth had not had physical relationships with a man. So we see here in the very first indication of God's plan to redeem man the suggestion that man's salvation would be accomplished by and through one who would deliver man from Satan and by the One that would come only by the seed of woman. This necessitates a virgin birth.

In Isaiah 7:14 we have an explicit statement of the Old Testament that prophesied the virgin birth. “*Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.*” Matthew said this prophecy was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:22,23). If he said this was it, who can deny it?

The setting of the prophecy was that Syria and Ephraim were threatening Judah and King Ahaz. Isaiah advised Ahaz not to depend upon Assyria for help, but to look to the Lord. He said the two nations would be brought down as “*two tails of smoking firebrands.*” Ahaz was encouraged to ask for a sign of God's deliverance, but he refused. Then Isaiah said God would give a sign to Judah, all the nation, not just Ahaz. The sign would be that a virgin would bear a son whose name would be Immanuel. A sign was something miraculous. A normal conception and birth is no miraculous sign. Isaiah was not speaking of a normal birth in his time but the virgin birth of Jesus.

Furthermore, Isaiah said in the time it would take for a child to reach maturity, Syria and Ephraim would be without power. This would be a comfort to Ahaz and Judah that Judah would survive and the enemy be destroyed.

The sign was miraculous. A young, marriageable, unmarried and chaste woman would conceive and bear a son. Matthew tells us what fulfilled that prophecy and he was inspired. Why cannot those who say they believe the Bible be content with what the Bible says about it? No other birth could possibly have

fulfilled that prophecy because no other son was born of a virgin and named "*Immanuel*." Some contend for what they call a dual-fulfillment, which is the contention that someone, somewhere in Isaiah's day was also meant. But if such a person ever existed we have no location of him or his virgin mother, or one of his name. The dual-fulfillment position is nothing but a foolish attempt to compromise with modernists that deny the prophecy had anything to do with Christ but only somebody in Isaiah's day. Matthew settles the matter, if you accept Scripture. If you be one who has been trained scholastically in the liberal seminaries and swallowed their lies you will likely keep looking for some way to harmonize liberalism and the Bible with theories like dual-fulfillment or outright modernism.

Perversions

Some modern "versions," like the Revised Standard Version in particular, have changed the word "*virgin*" to simply read "young woman," thus removed the prophecy of the virgin birth. Even some of our ridiculously liberal preachers have tried to defend this modernistic perversion of Scripture. Yes, Mary was a young woman. But calling a woman a young woman does not say of her what calling her a virgin says of her. Isaiah and Matthew said "*virgin*." We will have to let the unbelievers, the modern translation perverters and the "scholarly" preachers sink together in their own error. I have no respect for any man who claims to be a gospel preacher who will take the side of those who deny the virgin birth of Christ and try to defend their revision of God's evidence of His Deity. Nor do I ever expect to respect them. Why should anybody?

Again, Isaiah 9:6,7, "*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth ever for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.*"

His Name

The names given to the child to be born indicates Deity as well

as humanity. How could any fleshly child be called by names denoting Deity except He be begotten of Deity and born of woman? Only by the virgin birth could this become possible and be reality. By the virgin birth of Jesus by Mary He was the fleshly descendant of David, being born of woman, but He was conceived in her by Deity, making Him the Son of God. The New Testament makes it plain that Isaiah's prophecy refers to Jesus Christ and no other.

Jeremiah 31:22 prophesied that *"the Lord hath created a new thing in the earth. A woman shall compass a man."* Many attempts have been made to explain this passage without reference to the virgin birth, but none fits the needs of the passage. Some have said it means a woman shall protect a man, but that is nothing new then or now. Others have said it meant a woman would embrace a man. That's new? Still others said it referred to a woman having a manchild in her arms, or in her womb. That is not new. Every manchild has been there. But a woman having a manchild in her womb without the agency of man is certainly a new thing in the earth.

The context of the chapter shows it has reference to Christ. It speaks of the judgment against Satan and a spiritual restoration which was the mission of Christ. It speaks of the new covenant to come (Jeremiah 31:31) which Hebrews makes clear is the covenant of Christ (Hebrew 8:8). In that context the passage is understood as an anticipation of a new thing, a virgin birth.

New Testament Evidence

In the New Testament we have several references to His virgin birth. We have already noted Matthew's inspired interpretation of Isaiah in Matthew 1:22,23. Strange how some today think they have greater insight into the meaning of Isaiah 7:14 than did this inspired apostle and writer.

Prior to that verse, Matthew 1:18, we are told how Mary was with child *"before they came together."* Luke 1:27, Mary is called a virgin when Gabriel announced the coming birth. Luke 1:34 tells how Mary affirms she had not known man. Luke 1:35 tells how she would conceive the child. *"The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."*

Not until after the birth of Jesus did Mary and Joseph live together in marriage and the conjugal relationship of husband

and wife (Matthew 1:25).

The modern “versions” have rewritten just about everyone of these passages and in so doing have removed by the new words the necessity of the virginity of Mary. How and why so-called preachers of the gospel will recommend, applaud and defend these distortions and these books that take away divinely-given evidences of the virgin birth of Christ and His Deity I shall never understand nor accept them as being true to truth. They play the role of a double-minded compromiser.

In Matthew one we read the genealogy of Jesus. In step after step we find the phrase how this one begat the next one. Yet, when we approach the birth of Jesus there is a significant change. *“And Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.”* (Matthew 1:16). The fact is, Joseph did not begat Jesus. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. The term *“only begotten”* used in John’s writings is the revelation of the incarnation of Deity.

Only Begotten

John 1:1,14 identifies Jesus as the Word and the Word became flesh. How else could the eternal Word become flesh except there be the virgin birth? He was begotten of God and born of woman. The very notations about Christ and the descriptions of Him denote the virgin birth.

Repeatedly Jesus is called the *“only begotten Son of God.”* (John 1:14, 18; 3:16,18, First John 4:9). This comes from the word *“monogenes”* which cannot be translated correctly as the modern “versions” attempt when they say merely “only” or “one and only,” and now one has it “unique” and has even adopted the word “beloved.” To say Jesus was the only child of God would be a false statement since Adam is called a son of God. The Israelites were the children of God. Even Christians are His sons and daughters. The redundant rendering by the NIV, “one and only,” reflects a determined stance to adopt the new rather than the true. Jesus was certainly unique and beloved. But all men are unique and beloved. That says nothing of Deity as the term *“only begotten Son of God”* demands. Some contend it has nothing to do with the virgin birth, but they are dead wrong. The very first time the Holy Spirit used the term was by John when depicting the incarnation. How else was that accomplished except by the virgin birth? There is good reason to hold suspect the scholarship and soundness of anyone who

seeks to “ape” the liberals and modernists and who wish to defend perversions that remove evidences of the Deity of Christ.

He Is Lord

Matthew 22:42-46 has David calling Jesus, “Lord,” as he did in Psalm 110:1. Yet, Jesus was also called the son of David. Fathers do not call their sons, “Lord,” meaning Master. How could Jesus be David’s son and still receive the calling, “Lord?” It could only be in the fact that Jesus was a fleshly descendant of David and born of the human virgin, but the Lord of David inasmuch as He was begotten of God and was Deity taking the form of flesh. Though the passage is not explicit in its demands of the virgin birth, it is implicit and cannot be understood without the necessity of the virgin birth.

In Philippians 2:5-8 we read of how Deity took on the form of man. How else was this done except by Jesus becoming human through being born of the virgin Mary who conceived Him by Deity? That statement in Paul’s epistle looks back to the reality of the virgin birth and Paul acknowledges its historicity. This idea that the apostle never believed that Jesus was born of a virgin is absurd in the light of this passage. Paul accepted the truth revealed in Matthew, Luke and John.

These are some of the Biblical evidences of the virgin birth of Jesus and His Deity, authority and man’s accountability to Him. To deny the virgin birth is to deny the Deity of Christ. To question the virgin birth is to question the Deity of Christ. To remove evidences of the virgin birth (as modern “versions” do) is to remove divine evidences of the Deity of Christ. No true friend of the Lord will be a party to such as that nor defend it.

Beware of Changes

In this lesson we have cited some sixteen specific passages that demand the virgin birth of Jesus Christ either explicitly or implicitly; in anticipation or as historical fact. It is not to be considered a small thing that ten of these sixteen passage have been so changed in one modern “version” or another so that they could not be used as evidence of the virgin birth. That is how serious the modern version question is. But some say it makes no difference regarding fellowship even if one endorses, promoted and preaches the message of the modern “versions.”

(continued page 6)

The Basis For Effective Evangelism

Great emphasis is given in the New Testament for evangelism. *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* (Mark 16:15). *"Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe whatsoever I have commanded you."* (Matthew 28:19,20).

Romans 10:13-17, *"Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh of hearing and hearing by the word of God."* Acts 8:4 reads, *"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the gospel."* Second Timothy 2:2 instructs, *"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also."*

Evangelism is going and telling the story. We hear people say, *"We can evangelize the world in our generation."* And so we can. We have the means, methods, money and members. That which is often lacking is the desire, determination and will. To the extent that is lacking we will not evangelize.

Something First

But there is something else that must precede the means, methods, money and men, and even the will to evangelize. This is the burden of this lesson.

We are being told that religion is losing its influence in our world, especially in our American society. Some brag and boast of this. This is disturbing, but we believe it is true. It is realistic to recognize it. The religious revival that followed World War II has subsided and waned away. In its place has come a definite moral decline and laxity in behavior that bears deadly fruit

every day. It makes one wonder if there was much genuineness in the fervor of the so-called revival.

Increasing numbers are being taught and accepting the denial of the existence of God. Secular humanism is dominating the educational scene. Churches have lost members and membership is in decline. Those that are experiencing growth, especially among churches of Christ, are those who have gone the way of denominational fashions of fun, food, frolic, entertainment, recreation, or cultism. The depth of spirituality seems to be shallow. There is a craving for the emotional and moving, but not the converting and conforming to the Lord's standards.

The influence of God-fearing people has lessened and is evident everywhere. Some are even talking in terms of the post-Christian era. What we often see today that is called Christianity is nothing but a human perversion of it. In too many instances we only see a few twitchings of dying muscles that have lost its grip on things. One poll informs us that seventy per cent of America's teenagers have made up their minds not to have any kind of religion. This they have been taught by schools, over television, by some political and sport celebrities by word and deed. "Do your thing" is the standard.

Some say Christianity will not die, and they are right. But the reason for saying so is often wrong. The church shall prevail eternally, but history shows that truth has been suppressed in the past and over long spans of time. What of those millions who will never hear and know God's message? Do we care that they will likely be our own descendants? The Dark Ages ruled the affairs of the world for centuries. What is there to keep that from being repeated when we are going the same way?

The reason we are Christians is because those before us saw the need to evangelize, go and tell the story. Those who come after us are dependent on us doing the same thing. Christianity is but one generation from practical extinction. There is no doubt that evangelism is the need of our day.

Where Evangelism Begins

There are three factors that must exist before there will be an effective evangelistic activity. It begins with the church. "*These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly, but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*" (First Timothy

3:14,15). The primary work of the church is preaching the gospel, spreading the Word. It is generally conceded, by friend and foe alike, that the religious people set the moral and spiritual level in a community. Unfortunately, this has been some of the problem. The moral and spiritual level has gone down, down, down, because many church members have compromised with the world, have become less and less militant, unwilling to take a stand lest they offend somebody, lest they place their material welfare in danger. So many church people have either joined the world, or have chosen to become passive and timid about what is right and wrong.

A church that merely reflects the desires and ambitions of the community and merely gives additional expression to the culture and level of the morals of the community is of no value to the cause of Christ. It has nothing to offer. It has no right to be called a church of Christ.

Many churches today have become little more than respectable religious clubs that as often as not give blessings to whatever members are doing as they are meeting the demands of Christianity as authorized of God. This is a widespread weakness of churches today. Such churches can never attract sinful humanity because there is not enough difference between them and the world.

A major charge against religion today is the inconsistency of those who are involved in it. Anti-church movements prosper because church members give them all the ammunition they need to grow. Too many have a form of godliness, but not Christlikeness. The doctrine of Christ has been compromised to satisfy the clamoring of the theologians and seminary trained clergymen. The worldly minded have a haven in many churches. Drinking, dancing, adultery, cheating, immodesty, materialism, can all be found in great array among many churches. The frivolity and foolishness of emotionalism has displaced conversion. Fewer and fewer even know the cost of Christian living, let alone display a willingness to submit to it.

Effective evangelism begins when those who call themselves Christians are truly a body of people with faith and convictions that cannot be moved; people who have separated themselves from the sins of this world; whose mind is set on things above; who are disciplined, trained, informed, directed by the Bible and who dare to stand up and be counted.

Proclamation

A second necessity for effective evangelism is the proclamation of the Mighty Savior. Jesus can be described in many ways, such as a noble example, master teacher, miracle worker. But only when He is proclaimed as the Savior of mankind by virtue of being the Son of God is there to be effective evangelism. Salvation of the spirit of man is the message that must be preached and Christ is the only Savior.

The world is not in need of a better philosophy, more majestic church buildings, paved parking lots, air-conditioned "sanctuaries," or fellowship halls and gymnasiums. It needs a Savior; a guide in life and a warning of eternity. Mankind wants to go his own way but he needs more than simple reform. He needs to be reborn.

We do not need the "new morality" which is nothing but immorality. We do not need the paltry excuses, explaining away sin, psychological sedatives and the removal of individual responsibility before God for our lives. We need the humble confession of dependence on God, acknowledgement of our lost condition in sin, the gaping jaws of an eternal hell, and that there is one Savior, Jesus Christ.

The gospel is God's power to save (Romans 1:16). Attempts to woo and win by playgrounds, sensationalism, entertainment, oratory and the "cream of wheat" sermonettes is a waste of time and an opium to the mind.

The cross is the attraction that must be presented. If that is not sufficient, then those who reject it seal their own doom in spite of all that God and man can do. It is the truth that makes the alcoholic quit drinking, the prostitute to clean her life, the broken homes be healed, the wrecked lives remade, the delinquents behave, etc.

Some churches today have the finest buildings, every convenience, big staffs, all kinds of methods and means of communication, and what are they doing with them? Many are simply telling pretty stories and letting people think all is well when actually hell awaits them because they have not obeyed God.

In recent years some churches of Christ have gone "bananas" over methods and have forgotten the message. With all the advantages of modern technology and communication, still the world grows worse and worse and distortions of the truth multiply. Those who have the commission to take THE STORY to the world have been sidetracked in pursuit of money, numbers, glamor, acceptance by the world, and neglected the

real task of evangelism.

Much energy and effort of God's people in recent years has been expended shoring up its own defenses from attacks within by liberals and modernists. The collegiate element has swallowed the digressive teaching gained from denominational seminaries and schools have become primary centers for the promotion of apostasy. While a few years ago the churches of Christ were known as a Bible centered people, today when you see a sign denoting a Church of Christ, you have no real idea just what might be meeting there anymore. Digression and apostasy has taken a deadly toll.

Churches have the greatest message men can hear, the changeless, timeless, saving Word of God. Its voice must be distinctive and not just another echo of the same kind being poured out by denominationalism. We must call men from the darkness of sin into His light, not just make them feel good about themselves, pacify their troubled minds over the affairs of the day, and give them a "good time" with trivia. The truth preached is the only way to evangelize the sinful world. "*But we preach Christ crucified...*" (First Corinthians 1:23.) Anything less than "*thus saith the Lord*" amounts to nothing.

A Burdened Heart

There must be a burdened heart and concerned spirit within the child of God. We can be orthodox in word and have an uncaring attitude and the job of evangelism will never be done. We can become so obsessed with show before the eyes of others that we lose the attitude of Paul who was willing to spend and be spent for the cause of Christ and salvation of souls (Second Corinthians 12:15). This may be one of our biggest problems.

Noah's very soul was vexed because of the sinfulness around him (Second Peter 2:8). He was distressed by it. Therefore he preached God's righteousness. He did not convert many, did he? He saved only his family. How many of us will do as much?

We can study means, methods, etc. about evangelism all we want and never amount to anything regarding it. It is all too evident that we need to go to the heart of the matter and build again a converted church that will care enough for souls to "preach the word." We must look within if we are ever going to activate effective evangelism. If and when we will do that, then someday means and methods may seem more appropriate.

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ARTICLE: Must Everybody Do Just Like Me?

There are matters of faith that God expects everyone to believe alike and practice alike. There are also matters that involve human judgment and opinion where everybody does not have to think and do just alike. Matters of faith are determined by "*thus saith the Lord.*" Matters of judgment and opinion arise when determining how things should be done when there is no "*thus saith the Lord,*" but still must be done.

I do not enjoy being critical of others, especially of those who are preaching the gospel. Gospel preachers receive so much criticism and so much of it is unjustified because they are criticized for doing their work as God would have it done. But there are some areas where some preachers need criticism because they seem to think everybody must do just what they do and if you do not you are not quite as committed to the cause of Christ, not as devoted, not as dedicated as they have thought themselves to be. Consider the case in point.

Through the years I have heard some who preach be critical of those who devote their full time to working with the church and are what we call fulltime preachers. They are accused of being parasites off the church, lazy, not able to hold other jobs and other derogatory remarks are made about them, often by those who are what we call part time preachers, those who may earn their livelihood other than by preaching. Why should the man who earns his money in other ways think his way is the only way and others are less than what they ought to be if they are fulltime preachers? Must everybody do as they do?

On the other hand, I have heard fulltime men berate those who have other occupations to support themselves and their families but who also preach. They are called "jack leg" preachers, whatever that is supposed to mean. Some talk as if somebody that is not fulltime is somehow not doing as he ought and is not as devoted and dedicated as others. They have no right to think and say such things. I get tired of hearing the boasting of people who seem to believe everybody must serve in the kingdom the way they do or something is just not quite as committed as they think they are.

Paul was supported in his work. He also made tents at times. No man who is a part time preacher, earning his living in other ways, is inferior to the fulltime man. Nor is the fulltime man less than one who is not dependent on brethren for his living support. Each one serves and serves in the way he thinks he is best suited for his circumstances and conditions. Who has the

right to become the judge to say what everybody ought to do? Some preachers have been forced from fulltime work to sustain their families, but continue to preach as they have opportunity. Are they less than loyal to Christ? Does one have to be a fulltime man to be faithful? Should he see fit to alter his work in ways expedient to his needs, does this make him less than what he ought to be? Who can say so?

At the same time, when a man leaves other occupations to devote himself to preaching fulltime, why are there some who are fortunate to have other means of support and take little or nothing for their work be critical of those who must live by the gospel they preach and be sustained by brethren? Such self-righteous attitudes and comments that come from some preachers border on the disgusting. It reveals that they must think everybody must do just like they do or somehow something is amiss. Such conceit, arrogance and attitude of superiority is unbecoming to anyone, especially from preachers toward other preachers. It is shameful and the self-centered, egotistical, know-it-all fellows need to trim their plows. Just because a man changes his work in the kingdom is no cause to accuse him of putting his hand to the plow and looking back. He still serves and serves effectively and in the way he knows he serves best. Just who does the critic think he is to berate the work of another just because he chooses to work differently?

Some are so self-righteous that they are in foreign fields while others criticize those in foreign fields as being people who could not make it at home. Such rot as that is reprehensible! May God's blessings abide with faithful brethren whether they have chosen to work at home or elsewhere. They have the right to make that choice without being degraded by somebody else who chooses to serve in other ways and places. It is not fitting for such attitudes and comments to be heard among preachers or brethren anywhere. It reflects a sorry heart in the critic.

Some preach fulltime at one church. Others fill in for others. Some are part time. Some go long distances. Others stay near home. Some hold meetings. Others write and publish papers. Why must we think everybody must do just like we do before they are really first class workers in the vineyard of the Lord? Such as I have been discussing ought be erased from existence among us. And believe me, and I know whereof I speak, some have a good bit of erasing to do.

Thank God for every laborer, every faithful gospel preacher, whenever and wherever he preaches the truth. JWB

The Precious Death

"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints." (Psalm 116:15).

While most of us will likely consider death, either our own or that of someone near to us, as being a tragic loss, God does not consider the death of those who are His in the same light.

There is something very beautiful about the life that has been lived in faithful service to God. That beauty will be an influence for good long after the person who so lived has left this life.

The death of a faithful saint, a Christian, is like going home. Having lived and loved among men in the manner of the way of God, he now leaves the joys and sorrows of this life and is ushered into an eternal existence of the most sublime reward. God welcomes him home. He has served loyally and persistently against the powers of evil and labored diligently on the side of what is good, right and pure. His passing is therefore a precious event, even though those left behind will mourn the departure of such a one from their company.

The death of each of us can be precious in the sight of God if we will walk according to His will while on this earth. Make this your aim.



JAMES W. BOYD

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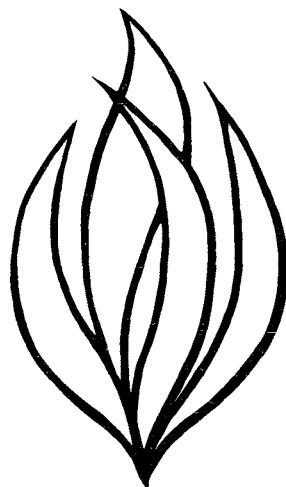
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A Burning Fire



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



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Every Christian Ought To Attend Every Service

“Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears, and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.” (Second Timothy 2:2-4).

Some sermons reprove; some rebuke; some exhort; some do a little of all three. Some lessons are more applicable to one than to another. Some lessons are well received; some rejected, even in anger. Experience as well as Scripture forewarns those who preach that his hearers can be friendly or hostile. Regardless of all of that, he must preach the word. *“He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favor than he that flattereth with the tongue.” (Proverbs 28:23).*

No sermon is chosen or preached just to offend. But the truth will offend those who are set against it. When people hear what they do not like or what contradicts what they say and do they react differently. Some will investigate in order to learn. Some grow angry. Some just ignore the sermon. Some will say they agree with it, but continue to live contrary to it.

Some complain about lessons on attendance at worship. “We need more spiritual food, answers to our problems, comfort, encouragement, how to deal with day-to-day stress and strain in Christian living.” All of this is true. It is because this is true that we need lessons on faithfulness in attendance to worship and study periods. This is where the spiritual food is served; where the answers are offered; where the comfort and encouragement is given. If we will listen to sermons with the attitude of Samuel, *“Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth,”* we will profit from such lessons on the necessity of attendance at every worship service.

Absenteeism

Over the years we have determined that only eighty per cent or less of the members of the congregation will attend some service during the course of a week. It is not the same eighty per

cent each week. This means twenty per cent of the members will not be in attendance at any service during the week. This takes into account the sick and those who are away from home, which is all too frequent for some.

Only two thirds of the members of a congregation are present at their home congregation on a given Sunday. About fifty per cent do not attend Bible study. Two thirds of the members are absent at mid-week service and just about the same on Sunday evening, sometimes even less. So whether you consider it important or not, the fact remains that many members have never learned, never respected, or just do not care about their responsibility concerning attendance at every service.

Worship Expected

God expects worship from His people (John 4:23,24; Matthew 4:4). Worship was a part of the Old Testament life as well as the New. Paul attended the worship (Acts 20:7). The early brethren were steadfast in it (Acts 2:42). The Jewish Christians worshipped (Philippians 3:3). Worship is what we do at every service. We sing, pray, study, and on Lord's Day we also eat the Lord's Supper and give of our means. Does this matter? Can we exclude it?

It is evident that attendance was a problem in the early church (Hebrews 10:25). Some had the custom of being absent. The person who refuses to attend worship is refusing to worship as he ought. Not only is his absence a mark against him, but his attitude toward worship of God with his brethren compounds his spiritual problem.

The true and loyal Christian desires to worship God. We are to worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24). Can one worship in proper spirit if he wishes he did not "have to" be present? True Christians never seek to avoid worshipping God. They seek the opportunity and look forward to it.

Worship is a privilege as well as a duty. True and loyal Christians never have the attitude, "Do I have to attend?"

Willfully Absent

It is obvious that some even plan to be absent. It is not that they cannot be present, but they plan to be absent by planning to do something else at the very hour designated for worship. They plan week-end trips without consideration of worship.

They plan vacations, outings, visits, rest, recreation, entertaining of guests, making money, all sorts of things that conflict with worship. Even athletic events and school programs have been given first place before worship of God.

We are aware that sometimes conflicts arise and with a little thought and planning the conflict can be resolved. I recall one year when the public high school scheduled graduation exercises that conflicted with the worship services of the church. Some members were involved in both. The elders were considerate and scheduled the services at a different hour so both events could be attended by those involved in them. But, wouldn't you know it? The very ones for whom the change was made to assist them ignored the worship altogether. Now if that is not a mark of putting lesser things first there is not a Jew in Jerusalem. In the words of James, *"My brethren, these things ought not so to be."* We could do better than that if effort was made.

Example

We ought to be present for the sake of a good example. No man lives to himself (Romans 14:7). We all have and shall give account for our influence. We ought to give up whatever we have to give up in order to be a good example (Romans 14:1; First Corinthians 8). Deliberate absenteeism is sin. Attendance is a good example. *"To whom that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* (James 4:17).

Can anyone really question that deliberate absenteeism is a bad example for outsiders as well as insiders to observe? What do you think Jesus would plan to do on Sunday evening? Where do you think Jesus would plan to be at the Bible study hours? Do you think He would ignore the mid-week services? Are we not to walk as He walked and follow in His steps? Little wonder many young people do not respect the church and worship services. Their parents and others have taught them, by example, to do whatever you want even if it means missing the worship services.

At the hour of every worship service we are saying to our brethren, to our lost associates, and to God, one of two things. It is either, "I care and want to worship," or "I don't care and won't worship." Only if we are physically unable to be present do we have reason to be absent.

Presence of Christ

Christ is going to be present at every service. *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."* (Matthew 18:20). Tell me you do not care about that! We often make special efforts to be in the presence of this world's notables when we can. But what of being with the Son of God, the One who lived and died to save you from hell?

I was in a meeting in northern Alabama one year at electioneering time. A prominent candidate was speaking in a nearby city one night of the meeting. Where do you think many were, including some elders and deacons? Yes, they went to hear their candidate for election rather than support the gospel meeting. You can be sure they heard about that before that meeting was over. As I recall now, for some reason I never was invited to go back there for any other gospel meeting. Do you wonder why? But can you imagine such as that? Is that the strength of the kingdom of God?

Nourishment

When we come we are offered the opportunity to feed upon the truth and learn what God wants of us so we can be pleasing to Him and bring glory to His name. Does that make any difference? Yes, it does. Does that make any difference to you? Failure to know the Word is at the root of many who fall away. Failure to love the Word is at the heart of apostasy.

Paul taught the Word of God to the Thessalonians and he said, *"He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit."* (First Thessalonians 4:8). It is not just men who are offended, but God is displeased at absenteeism due to disrespect for His Word.

Faithful attendance by members helps the church to grow. Loyalty is an essential ingredient in growth. How can we expect others to care when we leave the impression that we do not? Financial ability of the church to do the work God wants done is reflected in faithful attendance and contribution. Too many leave everything up to somebody else and assume they have no responsibility at all. They are sadly mistaken and their heart is confused, but everyone suffers because of it. No church can fill its mission when members are haphazard about attendance.

These truths are really beyond the realm of debate. Yet, many brethren reject them. Not many will come out loud and say they reject them, but they reject them just the same by what they do,

or what they do not do. But if you ignore such things as we have brought to your attention, you are in for one more hard time trying to justify your position before man or God.

Dear friend, resolve, here and now, to be faithful from this day forward to all the services of the church. We must leave it with you to decide who will benefit the most.

† † † † †

Everyday Religion

Should you take a concordance and check the words, "*daily, day by day, every day, each day,*" you might be surprised how many, many times they appear in Scripture. We hear people talk about everyday clothes, Sunday clothes, Sunday shoes, everyday shoes. Some people seem to have a Sunday religion and others have an everyday religion. Some put their religion on once or twice a week while others wear theirs everywhere, all the time.

Some who profess Christianity give the appearance that Christianity is only a social matter, a club to which they belong, a respectable thing to hold membership. They "go to church" rather than go to worship. The church building is a place to go and see and be seen on Sundays, provided nothing else comes up that appeals to them. When they have "paid their dues" to the Lord on Sunday they feel they have done their duty. They greet and are greeted and that is about it.

It Is Daily

Being a Christian does provide social advantages because it offers opportunity for fellowship and association with God's people. We make friends and enjoy activities of many kinds with people who share our convictions, standards, goals and ideals. But Christianity is not just a "Sunday" thing.

Under the Law of Moses the Jews had daily services and sacrifices. For example, (Exodus 29:38,39), lambs were slain on the altar daily. Incense was burned every morning (Exodus 30:7,8). The things written in the Old Testament are for our

learning (Romans 15:4) and for our example (First Corinthians 10:11). As their religion was a daily matter, so is the Christian faith.

Those activities mentioned were performed by the priests. Under Christ every Christian is a priest (First Peter 2:5; Revelation 5:10). Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that we, as priests of God, are to have daily activities in serving God under Christ as did they when they served God under Moses.

Prayer

What does daily Christianity involve? It involves prayer. The burning of incense was a type of prayer (Revelation 5:8; 8:3). Incense was burned daily and we are to pray daily. Jesus taught us to pray, *"Give us this day our daily bread."* Obviously, this was a daily prayer. David prayed daily. *"Evening and morning and noon, I will pray, and cry aloud, and he shall hear my voice."* (Psalm 55:17). *"Mine eye mourneth by reason of affliction, Lord, I have called daily upon thee, I have stretched out my hands unto thee."* (Psalm 88:9).

Knowledge

Daily Christianity involves daily study of the Bible. Emphasis on daily Bible readers was once heavy among brethren, but has waned through the years in our Bible study classes. Being a daily Bible reader was something for which to strive. John 5:39, *"Ye search the Scripture for in them ye think ye have eternal life."* We are commanded to *"Study to show thyself approved unto God..."* (Second Timothy 2:15). The noble Bereans searched the Scriptures *"daily"* to learn what was true (Acts 17:11). The blessed man of Psalm one found his delight in the law of the Lord, *"and in his law doth he meditate day and night."*

Children are sent to secular schools five days a week and are in various classes several hours each day. Yet, some think one or two hours in a class at the church building is sufficient time to devote to Bible study in an entire week. Little wonder there is such a growing ignorance of the Word of God among members of the churches of Christ in some places. Even if a child was faithful in attendance at all worship services and Bible classes each week he would get less Bible study than he gets in arithmetic.

Growth

We are commanded to grow spiritually. Yet, such growth is impossible without feeding on the sincere milk of the Word (First Peter 2:2; Second Peter 3:18). Jesus said, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Father."* (Matthew 4:4). Would we consider a person properly fed physically if he partook of food only two or three times a week? Yet, the soul, which will exist eternally, is given less than that with many folks.

Evangelism

Daily Christianity involves daily concern for the lost. There is a song that has a verse, "Lead me to some soul today." Jesus said, *"I sat daily with you in the temple."* (Matthew 26:55). He taught someone every day. The early church was active in winning souls daily and souls were added to the saved daily (Acts 2:46; 5:42).

Today we often seem too busy with many matters to involve ourselves in talking to others about salvation. We talk about the weather, politics, games, finances, the world's conditions, but seldom if ever a word about the Lord, His church, salvation, and things that really matter. Paul said, *"I ceased not to warn you night and day with tears."* (Acts 20:31). This is a part of daily Christianity.

Building Up

Daily Christianity involves daily exhortation and edification. This means we are to advise, warn, encourage, instruct and build up one another. Christians have many duties. Some are duties to non-Christians and some are duties to brethren in the Lord. We can never forget that Satan wants to recapture the soul of some brother or sister. Hebrews 3:13 teaches, *"Exhort one another daily, while it is called today."*

In the event that one of our number falls, our exhortations are to be designed for his restoration (Galatians 6:1; Romans 15:1,2). We do not want one of our physical family to just drift away and no effort made to help him or her. We ought have such love for our spiritual family as well.

Christlike

Daily Christianity means daily living in the imitation of Christ, in word, manners, attitudes, speech, actions toward others, filling our duties. We read much about "fruit bearing" in Scripture. The fruit we are to bear is the "*fruit of the Spirit*" as found in Galatians 5:22ff). How you live your daily life, how you treat your family and associates, how you react to your responsibilities, what kind of character you are developing are all serious components of daily Christianity.

Service

Daily Christianity involves daily ministration or service to others. So many are in need of so much. Opportunities to help are almost limitless. The first problem the early church encountered was over providing for those who were lacking physical needs. There was a daily ministration. Men were appointed to see that such work was not neglected but expedited in the best manner. We each have daily needs. Some are not able to provide their needs. They need help. Those who have are to provide for those who lack. To have and not share is to show a lack of love for God (First John 3:17,18).

When I was just a lad I was a member of the Boy Scouts. Among the things a good scout was to do was a good turn to somebody else every day. That is what the Christian is taught to do. Daily service is an important part of daily religion.

Cross-bearing

Being a Christian every day involves cross-bearing. Jesus said, "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*" (Luke 9:23). All that we have said to this point is a part of cross-bearing, because it involves Christian duties. But it can well include things that are not pleasant to endure.

Bearing the cross was painful for our Lord. Cross-bearing may bring distress to us also. Not everyone you meet will be pleased that you are a Christian or that you are trying to walk in the steps of the Savior. You may be called upon to endure ridicule, persecution, exclusion from others, being considered unacceptable because you will not do what Christians cannot do. You may have to set aside many thing that others do because you have decided to go to heaven by putting the Lord first in your life. You cannot even have your own way in things because you

must always consider, "What would Christ have me to do?" Then you must follow His way. To bear His cross means to submit to whatever may be demanded of you for faithful service as a Christian. It is not the burdens in life that are common to all. It is a performance of Christian living. Many of the habits, activities of this world will be "off limits" to the child of God.

We do not bear the cross to pay for our forgiveness because we can never earn salvation. But bearing the cross is an essential part of being a Christian everyday. Bearing the cross is a figurative expression because we will not bear a literal cross as did Jesus. But it means we must carry our duties to the limit and fulfill them as a child of the Lord. Jesus said, "*He that taketh not his cross and followeth after me is not worthy of me.*" (Matthew 10:37). The song asks, "Must Jesus bear the cross alone, and all the world go free?" The next phrase gives the answer. "No, there's a cross for everyone and there's a cross for me."

Daily Results

Everyday religion, everyday Christianity will produce everyday results. It will bring everyday blessings and benefits. It will see souls saved, the saved strengthened, the needy served, life being lived to the glory of God. Daily Christianity enables the Christian to say, "There is nothing that shall happen this day that God and I together cannot handle." Daily religion keeps us in daily contact with the Father through the Son as we walk according to the revelation of the Spirit in Scripture.

What kind of religion do you practice? Is it an on-off affair? Is it a Sunday thing, and that not even regularly? Or have you grown to the place where Christ is with you each step of the way because you are following His lead and walking His way, each day? This is the religion He wants for us all.

† † † † †

WHO SAID IT?

I really don't know that anybody has said it. But if they have not, somebody should. Surely, the idea has been expressed in many ways. "You cannot get to heaven on the blunders and sins of others." That ought to be self-evident.

Why The Word Became Flesh

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us [and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father], full of grace and truth." (John 1:1,14). "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness; God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory." (First Timothy 3:16).

These passages teach that Christ is Deity, and was God as well as man, man as well as God. He was on earth the combination of Deity and humanity. As His name implies, the name "*Immanuel*," He was "*God with us*," God manifest in the flesh.

Our question for study is WHY did God become flesh? Why the incarnation, that is, Deity taking on the form of humanity? Why was the Second Person of the Godhead given a fleshly and bodily form and come to this earth to live among men as a man?

Demands of Justice

There are several answers to these questions, but we shall concentrate on one, the primary one. We first must consider an eternal and indisputable principle of truth. Law and justice, when violated and offended, demands something. It demands a repayment. Psalm one teaches, "*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*" First John 3:4 defines sin as a transgression of the law, meaning, God's law. God holds man responsible for his transgressions. The father who never holds his children responsible for their actions will soon have the mortifying experience of seeing all kinds of disorder prevail in the home and family. This same thing is true in schools, in the state, in society generally. Each one must be held responsible. The demands of law and justice must be met or anarchy, lawlessness

and chaos will dominate the scene. God knew this when He banished from His presence angels that rebelled against Him (Jude 6; Second Peter 2:4).

But what is sufficient to meet and satisfy the demands of justice in the event of violations against God's will? What is the proper punishment for a crime is a constant problem that men face when executing civil justice. How many years of confinement is deserving for a crime? When should capital punishment be administered? Parents wrestle with this matter all the time. How much punishment is due the child when he does wrong? What is a just penalty? We do not wish to minimize the great moral problem here. Too little is ineffective, and too much is counter productive. If the problem is so great in the smaller matters of this world, how much greater is the problem when God, the perfect Creator, is offended and His will violated? Just what is satisfactory punishment for sin?

Only God, the offended one, can determine this. Paul wrote, *"For the wages of sin is death."* (Romans 6:23). This refers to spiritual separation from God. From the events of the Garden of Eden there was a mystery of mysteries as to what God would deem sufficient penalty for sin. The penalty was death.

Justice and Mercy

Psalm 89:14 reads, *"Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne; mercy and truth shall go before thy face."* Now we have the question before us, "How could God be just and merciful at the same time?" Justice demands that offenders pay the penalty. Mercy calls for withholding from the offender the punishment he deserves. Yet, God is said to be both just and merciful. For man who sins, justice means spiritual death, but mercy means spiritual life. How would God accomplish both?

The way God accomplished and demonstrated both justice and mercy is the story of the Bible. Herein is the answer to our question as to WHY the Word became flesh.

How surprised Satan and his hosts must have been to hear the first hint that God would not only destroy Satan but also provide a way of salvation for man. *"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed, it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel."* (Genesis 3:15). Just how would God accomplish this?

How intently must the father of lies watched as the first animal sacrifice took place. Would such a sacrifice be sufficient to meet

the demands of justice and provide mercy? No, this was not the way. True enough, *"Without the shedding of blood there is no remission."* (Hebrews 10:4). But no animal sacrifice was adequate to pay the penalty (Hebrews 9:22).

How concerned Satan must have been when he learned of the promises that God gave to Abraham. *"In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."* (Genesis 22:18). How would God bless all nations through the seed of Abraham?

How suspiciously Satan must have watched the giving of the first covenant to Israel through Moses that called for many sacrifices and offerings, works of merit and ordinances to obey. But all these things proved to be and were designed and intended to be but a shadow of things to come (Hebrews 10:1). They were but a schoolmaster, leading to something else (Galatians 2:24). The old Mosaic Law could not do what needed to be done (Romans 8:3).

Payment For Sin

God's wisdom regarding the satisfactory payment for sin and the salvation of mankind was a matter the ancient prophets desired to know and inquired concerning it (First Peter 1:10). Even angels, principalities, powers in heavenly places desired to look into this matter (First Peter 1:12). But it remained a mystery, a matter unrevealed, as to how God would be both just and merciful at the same time.

In time, Christ was born. *"But when the fulness of time was come God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law ."* (Galatians 4:4). The Word became flesh. He was made in the likeness of man, being found in fashion as a man (Philippians 2:7,8).

No sooner had Jesus come from the waters of the Jordan River, having been baptized of John, He was assailed by a disturbed, suspicious, fearful and shrewed Devil with cunning temptations (Matthew 4). Satan attempted to destroy any power Jesus had or might have to overcome sin right at the very start of His mission. Through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life, in the way and manner by which he had subverted mankind in the Garden of Eden, he sought to undermine the Christ. But he was defeated in every attempt as the Lord Jesus properly and skillfully wielded the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Even so, Satan, sin, death and man's torment was not yet defeated. Justice had not yet been met for

sin. Forgiveness could not yet be offered. The way of escape and the way into the Holy of Holies was not yet provided.

The Role of Christ

Having lived a perfect life and proving His identity as the Son of God, eventually Jesus was seized and sacrificed on the Roman cross at Calvary. Once for all time, once for all mankind, the Son of man died, tasting death for every man (Hebrews 2:9; 9:12,28). With this sacrifice the penalty for man's sins was paid. *"And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world."* (First John 2:2). With His death on the cross, the demands of justice were met. His flesh was torn and His body mangled for the sins of the world (Romans 8:3). Even though He died, on the third day, He arose from the grave (Luke 24:46). In this way God broke the bars of death and Satan's grip on man was forced loose. Man now had the opportunity to be free. Atonement had been made. Satisfactory reparation for injury had been accomplished. God Himself had accomplished it by and through the death of His only begotten Son. Justice was appeased and Christ's death was a demonstration of justice being meted out. By this act God showed Himself to be both just and the justifier of the offended. *"To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."* [Romans 3:26].

God was just in that He exacted due penalty for sin. He was the justifier in that He now offered salvation to the sinner and extended to him His mercy. With the penalty paid, the just dying for the unjust, the righteous dying for the unrighteous, now the unrighteous could be made righteous and the unjust could be made just.

By the death of Christ on the cross, the basis and merit for man's salvation was secured. *"Moreover brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand, by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures."* (First Corinthians 15:1-4). Now God's will and His law, the demands of justice had been sustained, and yet, the violator could be saved. We begin to understand WHY the

Word became flesh. It was to pay for our sins and provide the way of our forgiveness and salvation.

Two More Truths

In addition, the Lord's death on the cross showed two other vastly important truths. One, the way of salvation was planned from the beginning (Ephesians 3:9). It was never God's intention to allow sin to pass without a just and adequate recompense. God knew from the beginning that He would exact justice.

Two, no sin could ever be pardoned on any other basis than the merits of the blood of the innocent Christ. It is evident that all of the sacrifices of the Patriarchal and Mosaic altars had not taken away sin, but were faithful illustrations and types of that one great sacrifice on which all must depend and without which no sacrifice would have any value. Man, the sinful one, could not pay for his own sins and be saved. Someone perfect had to pay for Him. Those before Christ's death, as well as those of us who have lived since His death, are saved by His blood (Hebrews 9:15; Romans 5:9). The blood of Christ flowed backwards as well as forwards from the cross, cleansing the faithful of their sins. Nothing less than the blood of God's Son was deemed adequate by God for the redemption of man. *"Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12).

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus had prayed, *"O, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."* (Matthew 26:39). It was possible for Jesus to escape the horrors of the cross and to have been delivered from His suffering as far as God having the power to release Him. But it was not possible if God's plan for man's redemption was to be accomplished. This plan was God's plan. It was that plan that provided justice and mercy at the same time. Jesus was willing to do what had to be done for God's plan to become a reality.

Now we see the primary reason WHY the Word became flesh. There are other reasons, important but not primary, such as enabling Him to be the High Priest, allowing Him to be our example, giving Him opportunity to teach His will and standards, etc. But the provision of justice and mercy is the principal purpose of the Word becoming flesh.

What in Return?

What shall we give in return for such a sacrifice? Paul taught us to be a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1,2). As the poet has written in the following lines:

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so Divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

We plead with everyone not to deprive themselves of the benefits procured for them through the infinite merit of the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In this lesson you have had presented to you the pre-existence of the Savior, His incarnation, God's justice and mercy, the mission of the Christ, His death, resurrection and saving blood. This is God's plan for man's salvation, and man need only to obey the commands of the gospel to benefit from what God has done.

† † † † †

The Way Of Justification

"Now we know that whatsoever things the law saith, it saith to them that are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe, for there is no difference. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God, to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Romans 3:19-26).

The theme of the passage is the way man is justified before God. It tells of the way man is made right with God. It does not say all that the Bible teaches regarding this way, but we shall investigate other Scriptures alongside this one.

The importance of such a study is realized when we consider that all people face death, the resurrection, the judgment and eternity. Our eternity will be in one of two places, heaven or hell. The way of justification is the way to heaven. There is nothing we need to know that is so important as the way of being justified before God.

Definition

We need a clear understanding of the term "*justification.*" We can get this understanding by considering the ways it is often used in our language. Consider a man accused of a crime. He is tried, found innocent, set free and is acquitted. He deserved his freedom. He earned it. He was not guilty. His works were not evil. We say his release was justified.

Another man is accused, tried, found guilty, but is set free on the basis that he was justified in his action. Possibly he acted in self defense or other conditions warranted what he did. Again, according to the law, he deserved to go free even though he actually had done that of which he was accused.

But Paul's use of the term is different from the first two we just noted. Here a man is tried, found guilty as charged, and there was not reason or excuse for his deliberate transgression and rebellion. If he is set free it will be because he is forgiven and pardoned. Paul's use of justification is treating the guilty as if he was innocent. This is what God does when He justifies sinful man. Man is guilty of sin and without reason or excuse, but God allows him to be delivered from its wages.

Redemption means buying back. Something is sold but is bought back or ransomed. Man sells himself to Satan by sinning. Justice demands that sin be punished, accounted for, and the price paid. But Christ has paid the price by His blood in man's stead, and man is redeemed. This is what it means to be justified before God.

Not by the Law of Moses

Paul began with reference to the Mosaic Law. People are accountable to whatever law is over them. Israel was

accountable to God under the law that God gave them at Mount Sinai through Moses. That law had several purposes. Paul says it gave knowledge of sin (verse 20). Sin is a transgression of the law (First John 3:4). The existence of the law proves that all do sin. None can answer in their own defense, and all mouths are stopped.

That law was a temporary measure to bring us unto Christ (Galatians 3:24). Christ fulfilled the purposes of the law and the prophets. *"Think not that I am come to destroy the law and the prophets; I am come not to destroy but to fulfill."* (Matthew 5:17). That law has been taken out of the way, being nailed to the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:14).

The way of justification is not by the Law of Moses. It never was God's intention for that law to be the way of justification. It could never justify (Romans 3:20; Acts 13:39; Galatians 2:16; 3:11).

Even the prophets bore witness that the law was not the way of justification (Romans 3:21). In Galatians four Paul cites events recorded in the Old Testament and the Mosaic Law to show the relationship that exists between the Law of Moses and the New Covenant of Christ. The old law is like Ishmael and the new like Isaac, the promised child. As Ishmael was cast out so was the Law of Moses (4:30). It is the will of Jesus Christ to which men look for the way of justification. It is *"by faith of Jesus Christ,"* His system (Romans 3:22). None are justified by the works of the old law (Galatians 2:16). The reason the old law does not save is because the way of salvation is the way of faith (Galatians 3:11). The Law of Moses was a law of works and merit. One would have to live perfectly under the old law to be justified because that law made no provision for forgiveness without Jesus Christ.

Universal

Paul gives four characteristics of the way of justification. It is universal in nature. Salvation is open to all, Jew and Gentile. *"For there is no difference."* All are in need of salvation because all have sinned. Ancestry, color, other differences among men are of no consequence when it comes to the way of salvation. All can be saved, but all must be saved the same way.

Conditional

The way of justification is conditional. If it was unconditional then all would be saved regardless of their attitude toward God and His Son. There would be no cause for being righteous before God or serving the Lord. What kind of God would God be if He treated goodness and evil the same way? Justification is conditioned upon faith in Christ and according to His faith or religion. It is not by faith only and the Bible never teaches it as such. But it is by faith. From other portions of the Bible we learn that saving faith is the faith that obeys. Jesus said, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* But the point necessary to be learned here is that salvation, justification, is conditional. Man has his part and it must be met. Even then, he is not earning deliverance, but is doing what God says he must do to receive God's gift of salvation.

By Grace

Again, salvation is by grace (Romans 3:24). Grace is unmerited favor. Salvation is not by grace alone any more than by faith alone. But without God's gracious actions toward man there would not be any salvation. *"For by grace are ye saved, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of work, lest any man should boast."* (Ephesians 2:8,9). Even though there are conditions to be met, salvation is given to man and man cannot boast of his own righteousness. He is dependent on God for his justification.

By Blood

Justification is made possible by the blood of Christ. God made Him to be the propitiation, having reference to the satisfactory sacrifice that appeases God's wrath against sin. A propitiation is something given in order to render something favorable that had been unfavorable. It is a matter of reconciliation between God and man. Christ is the atoning sacrifice.

John identified Jesus as the propitiation in First John 2:2 and 4:10. Jesus was the all-sufficient sacrifice (Hebrews 9:20-28). Hebrews 10:10, *"We are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."*

The all-sufficiency and extensiveness of the blood of Christ is shown in verse twenty-five where it is implied that the blood of Christ is actually the forgiving power for sins committed both

before and after the cross. The blood of Christ flowed backward and forward to those who had met the conditions of the law under which they lived.

Jesus is the Just One. Only He could become the justifier. Only He could meet the requirement of the Just dying for the unjust. This sacrifice was offered so the wages of sin could be paid and God could justify the offender, the believer in Christ. At the same time, the justice against sin was paid by the death of Jesus the Christ.

One Way

The way of justification is the only way to be made right with God. It is separate and apart from the way of meritorious works of the Mosaic Law. It is open to all who will meet the conditions. It is made possible by the grace of God which has been manifested through the shedding of the blood of Christ.

But of what value is there to you, reading friend, that God has given this great way of justification if you ignore the Christ that made it possible? All have sinned, and that includes me and you. You cannot be saved in your sins but must be saved from your sins. God has provided the way and that way is through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God? Will you obey Him and receive the benefits of His actions on your behalf? Will you repent (Luke 13:3); confess your faith (Acts 8:37; Romans 10:10); be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; First Peter 3:21)? When one does as God has prescribed, he will be blessed as God has promised. Until one does as God has prescribed, he is in sin and cannot be saved in that state.

† † † † †

CHURCH GROWTH

All faithful brethren want the church to grow, numerically and spiritually. But if the emphasis is on the numerical to the neglect of the spiritual, you have labored in vain. When the emphasis is on the spiritual and there is also increase numerically, you enjoy two-fold success. Priorities matters. Seek first things first.

Jesus, the Bread of Life

Christ was the master teacher and unsurpassed preacher. Some of His great discourses include the Sermon on the Mount, His teaching to Nicodemus on the new birth, His lesson on the water of life to the woman at Jacob's well, and His teaching to the apostles before His crucifixion. We want to study His sermon on the bread of life found in John chapter six.

Forty-six verses are involved in the background of this sermon, the sermon itself, objections that some raised, and the results of the sermon. Do you have your Bible nearby?

The day before this sermon Jesus had fed the five thousand, walked on the water before the eyes of His apostles, and the multitudes had come to Capernaum seeking Him. But their motives were not always the best. *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled."* (John 6:26). Jesus urged, *"Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you; for him hath God the Father sealed."* (John 6:27). They asked, *"What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?"* (John 6:28). His response was, *"This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."* (John 6:29). His hearers were unwilling to accept that and asked for a sign of Him. Although He had already shown many signs, wonders and miracles they still refused the testimony and asked for more and more.

Manna

Jesus pointed to manna as a sign given to their fathers in the wilderness (John 6:31). Then He used this reference to bread, manna, which sustained the life of the Israelites in their wanderings as a place to begin His sermon on the bread of life.

John 6:32,33, *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world."* Moses had not given them the manna, but God through Moses. The same is true regarding the *"true bread."* It is from God and is offered through the One *"which cometh down from heaven."* The

bread of which Jesus spoke was bread that would give eternal life. That bread was a person, “he,” which cometh down from heaven.

Upon hearing of such bread, His hearers quickly requested, “Lord, evermore give us this bread.” (John 6:34). They were not yet attuned to the idea that Jesus was speaking of spiritual bread. Verse sixty-three says, “*It is the spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.*”

The Source of True Bread

Having shown that heaven was the source of the bread of life, He identifies that bread. John 6:35, “*I am the bread of life.*” Obviously, this is a figurative statement like such statements as, “*I am the door; I am the vine; I am the way; I am the good shepherd; I am the water of life.*” But Jesus shows how this “bread” is completely adequate, sufficient, fully satisfying, lacking nothing. Also verse thirty-five, “*He that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.*”

Christ continued His teaching as to how man partakes of this bread of life. It is by believing in Jesus and coming to Him (John 6:37, 40).

The reason Jesus is the sufficiency for life is presented in His statement of verse thirty-eight, which is a rather comprehensive statement concerning the mission of Jesus. “*For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of Him that sent me.*” Jesus often prayed, “*Thy will be done.*” It was God’s will that the lost be given opportunity to be saved. It is God’s desire that all be raised in the resurrection unto eternal life. He is not willing that any perish (Second Peter 3:9). There is no question as to what God prefers for every individual.

Response

The response to this teaching was unfortunate. Some “murmured” in skepticism and disbelief. They rejected the claim of Jesus as the bread of life. To them He was Joseph’s son. How could He say He was the bread of life and had come down from heaven?

Jesus taught how man partakes of the bread of life. John 6:44,45, “*No man can come to me, except the Father which*

hath sent me draw him; and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they all shall be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me."

Jesus had already taught that those that come to Him shall not be turned away (Verse thirty-seven). He had already shown that those who come to him do so by faith (Verse forty). Now He shows that none can come to Him unless they are drawn to Him by the Father. The way the Father draws men to Christ is through teaching and learning. Those that come are those that are drawn. Those that come are those that have been taught and have learned. Those that come, therefore, are drawn by the Father by being taught and by learning. This is the way that God draws mankind unto Christ. The appeal is by the Word.

"Faith cometh of hearing and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17). *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."* (Romans 1:16). *"He begat us by the word of truth."* (James 1:18). *"Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls."* (James 1:21). There is no salvation for anyone separate and apart from the Word of God. This is the means Deity uses to save humanity. We are *"begotten through the gospel."* (First Corinthians 4:15). Man is saved by the gospel (First Corinthians 15:1,2). The only way the Bible teaches that mankind can partake of the bread of life is by hearing, learning, being taught the Word of God. This is the way that mankind eats His flesh and drinks His blood in order to have eternal life. He consumes Christ into his own life. The gospel saves because it tells who is the bread of life, who is Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. As the Israelite fathers ate manna in the wilderness and died, we have the opportunity to partake of the spiritual bread of life and live.

A Turning Point

This sermon proved to be a crucial turning point in the ministry of Christ. His acceptance and popularity, for the most part, had been on the rise until this event. But this sermon was a serious revelation. *"I am that bread of life."* (John 6:48). *"I am the living bread which came down from heaven."* (John 6:51). Unless a man eats and drinks Christ, there is no life (John 6:53-56). This statement is not a reference to the Lord's Supper because we do not eat the body and drink the blood of Christ at

the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a memorial to the body and blood of Christ. Christ is not referring to a literal and actual eating and drinking of His body and blood. But as we absorb Jesus into our lives, as we consume His ways and follow them, as we make His will that guiding light of our will, our spirit is nourished, and it is not we that live but Christ living in us. The failure to partake of Christ in this way spells spiritual death rather than spiritual life eternally.

But some were offended at this teaching. They either did not understand it, or just refused to accept it. They hardened themselves against it. Even many of His disciples rejected His claim and verse sixty-six tells us, *"From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked with him no more."* But they acted like a starving man turning his back on the only food that could give him life.

Question and Answer

It was at this point that Jesus asked His apostles a question. *"Will ye also go away?"* (John 6:67). It was Peter, as was often his case, that quickly responded, *"Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."* (John 6:68,69).

They knew the source of life, and so do we. The living and true bread of life is Christ. They partook of him, and so must we. We rejoice that they did. But only I can partake of Christ to my benefit, and only you can partake of Christ to your benefit. The living bread is before us. The table is now spread. *"Whosoever will"* may come and live because of the bread of life.

† † † † †

BUSY, BUSY, BUSY

Certain seasons of the year are busier for some than at other times. Some folks stay running about full capacity most all the time. Everybody is busy doing something, even some who are busy at doing nothing. But make sure your "busy-ness" harmonizes with His business.

CHURCHES I APPRECIATE

You might think a gospel preacher would have respect and appreciation for every congregation. But why should he? Even the Lord did not. Just read the first chapters of Revelation. While He loved those people He was very displeased with them and did not appreciate what they were or what they were doing.

Personally, I have been fortunate to have had many opportunities to work with churches that deserve respect and appreciation. Not only is true of churches where I have worked as the regular preacher, but the many churches where I have been privileged to preach in meetings. It is impossible to say I have always appreciated all these churches. Some I really respected but they decided to go with the digressive drift and trend, adopt Bibles that teach false doctrines, or side with those who have abandoned truth on serious and multiplied matters. No, for such churches, their preachers and elderships, I have lost respect and appreciation of them. Truth is too important to continue to extend fellowship to those who war against it.

But there are many good brethren who are sound in the faith, who want sound doctrine, who are kind, benevolent, with a mind to work, with a missionary zeal, a concern for both the lost and saved. For these it is easy to have respect. They invite a preacher into their company and they allow, expect, even demand that he preach "*thus saith the Lord.*" They would not tolerate anything less or more. These are the kind of churches that faithful brethren, loyal preachers, not only love, but admire, appreciate and respect from the heart.

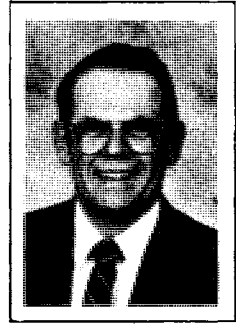
It would be wonderful to suggest that wherever you find a building with the identification over the door, "Church of Christ," that you would find people who respect divine authority, work and worship according to His revelation, and are in truth the church that belongs to Christ. Sadly, while this was true to a much larger extent a few years back, the inroads of innovations, compromises, departures and apostacies among the liberal and humanly legalistic elements have divided the church over and over again. You just cannot have that confidence by just considering what is over the doorway.

Brethren need to investigate churches before they extend fellowship to them. They should not be content to just "go along to get along" because error runs rampant among those once noted for their Biblical knowledge, faith and practice.

James W. Boyd

Thank You, Thank You, Thank You

Do any of you remember Private Gomer Pyle on the comedy routine on television? It was a good, clean program with very few exceptions. One thing that always got me tickled was the way he would drawl, "Thank you, thank you, thank you." I feel the same way he expressed to so many of you who have spoken and written words of encouragement to me about **A BURNING FIRE**. Yes, it does take considerable funds and considerable work. But I am confident it is accomplishing considerable good.



JAMES W. BOYD

Brethren, we cannot always know just what may be accomplished for the cause of Christ by our efforts, great and small. But it is gratifying to me to know that something positive is being done, truth is being taught, others are enjoying and profiting from these labors. I just do not know how to "thank you" for your support.

Of course, we get some objections now and then. But they can be counted on one hand. They are offset overwhelmingly by the good things from faithful brethren.

So let me say along with Gomer how much I appreciate each reader.

* * * * *

A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

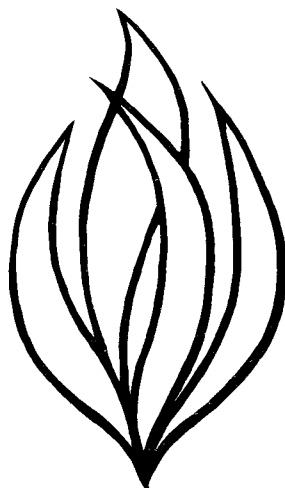
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A Burning Fire



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



THIS ISSUE

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Daniel Briggs Boyd

Back Cover

Has Your Home Been Robbed?

There is a master thief loose in the land, always at work, striking wherever he can. He picks our pockets, robs our homes, steals our most valuable possessions. He even lifts the spiritual seed from the hearts and minds of those to whom it is offered. He plants doubt, fear, error in its place. We know who the thief is and even many of the ways that he works. But too often we show slight concern about it.

This thief is so deceptive and sly, sometimes the theft is so gradual that those who are being robbed are not even aware of it. They go on about life so satisfied, as if everything is fine. They are so fascinated by the human solutions to problems, spellbound over the temporary and worthless offerings of the sinful world, that they lose sight of real treasure.

We hear much about burglary, larceny and homes being entered and property stolen. It is almost an epidemic in many places. But we all need to look about our homes. We may discover that we have been robbed, and have not even been aware of it. Precious things have been taken from us.

The Bible

Where is the Bible in your home? Certainly you have one somewhere. Nearly all homes have a Bible, don't they? It may well be covered with dust or other reading material because it is used so infrequently. It may be pushed back on some back shelf. You may as well not have one for all the benefit you get from it. Some people keep one around for emergencies, like sickness, weddings, funerals, or a visit from church people, especially the preacher.

But where is the Biblical influence in your home? Many homes are far more influenced by newspapers, magazines, journals, television, which often are not even fit to be seen and read, but are being consumed by the mind. Many homes have been robbed of the *"lamp unto our feet, and the light unto our pathway."*

Wherever the Bible is not prominently used in the home, ignorance of the will of God prevails. Confusion and

misunderstanding will reign where understanding is needful. Trust in God is displaced by trust in self, or some other human being or material something. The Bible has been robbed from many homes today and the result is disaster.

Worship

Where is the family worship in your home? "The family that prays together, stays together." This says more than we may at first recognize. Families that pray together show a common respect for God. They know what matters. Their values are in proper order. Prayer is one manifestation that the family is founded on something sound and eternal. Families like that seldom suffer the ravages of divorce, delinquency, hatred, quarreling, strife, bickering and separations. There is no force on earth more powerful to cement families than mutual love and respect for each other and God. Love for God keeps people loving one another. Families can take tensions and problems from outside and inside the home when they have their feet planted on solid spiritual truth.

Every home needs a two-way communication with God in Bible study and prayer. Most homes have radios, televisions, telephones with extensions, with all kinds of messages coming and going back and forth. Has your home been robbed of communication with God? Does your child know what it is to hear his father pray? Does he pray? Does he study his Bible, if of age to do so? Do you?

Values

Satan has really taken a deadly toll in many homes in disturbing the values of the home. The abundance of material things is often counted better than matters spiritual and eternal. Fun, rather than genuine joy and happiness, is sought. Seeking the praise and acceptance of the people of the world is the goal of many homes more than approval before God. Financial and other physical aspirations exceed the determination to serve God. Secular education is preferred to enlightenment of the soul. Money comes before morals. Pleasure is the name of the game with so many.

Little wonder that young people grow up confused and empty. Look at what has been taken from their homes. They hardly had a chance to see or know anything of real value. With

the home being little more than a filling station, both parents out making money, children neglected, the right and wrong according to God being ignored, how can anybody expect much more than what we are reaping in society today?

Discipline

The home that is without firm and kind discipline has been robbed. Adults need to practice self-discipline and the young need to be disciplined. To discipline is to train. *"The rod and reproof give correction, but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame."* (Proverbs 29:15). So many children are just allowed to physically grow up. They are not guided nor taught. Given no basic values, they are left to make decisions without the ability and knowledge to know how to make decisions. They do not even know what matters. How can they make intelligent and worthwhile decisions?

Character is formed by discipline. This involves more than chastisement, though this has its place. It is showing the child the way he should go. Words, accompanied by deeds, is the way to train. Some parents say so little to their children, do not even know what their children are thinking, who they are, where they go, what they are doing, with whom they run, and set such a poor example before them as well. Most of the fault for wayward youth lies at the feet of the parents of the home. So many have failed because of their own selfishness and greed and their children suffer and the home decays.

Authority

A home where there are no rule enforced is a home that breeds contempt for authority. The overbearing tyrannical rule will crush a child and turn him into a rebel. Also, the home that is lax and permissive will produce a leach on society and a shame to the home. What every home needs is the moral and spiritual guidance found from our Lord in the Bible. But many who are the authorities in the home think they are smarter than God and dismiss Him completely. So much of the problems of society and the home are brewed in the home that fails to exhibit proper respect and exercise of authority. Children either learn to respect authority or learn they can rebel against it. How is it with you and yours?

Thankfulness

Has your home been robbed of thanking God at mealtime? Has Satan removed that out of the way at your house? You may think this is unimportant, but it teaches a basic truth that God is the source of our blessings and thanksgiving to Him is expected and proper. It is not more than courtesy to thank those who give to you. We teach our young to be rude and uncouth to think that whatever they get is from our own efforts alone. Grace at meals gives glory to God. He deserves all the honor we can bestow. The least we could do is to thank Him at mealtime. But some families are like a pen of hogs, who just snort in eating and stuffing, giving no thought to the source of their blessings. Like the hog filling himself with acorns, he never looks up to see from whence they came.

Lord's Day

What consideration is given the Lord's Day at your house? More and more families consider Sunday just another day off from work to do as they please, go boating, play ball, sleep late, play golf, do anything you want. They never give God a thought even on Lord's Day. This is being taught in our society as the "in" thing. Even members of the church act like the worship services are an intrusion on "the only day I have."

Fruit borne proves the point. There was a time when people worshipped God on the first day of the week, spent time in spiritual thought, used the day for families and visiting and worship, attended to the affairs of the church, rested, gave themselves to good self-examination before God, and considered what really matters in life. But today, there is the constant blaring of sports, riotous living, even using the day to get more dollars in overtime. Merchandising is rampant. Even people who call themselves faithful Christians will absent themselves from the assembly of saints in the local church to have their good times. Some defiantly excuse themselves by taking the Lord's Supper with them as if this satisfies the teaching of the Bible. Such arrogant rebellion against truth is commonplace among brethren and it is wrong as can be!

We may not like the truth, but the truth is that the nation was a better nation when the stores were closed and ball games were played on Saturday. There is such a preponderance of secular and sinful thought among people today that even attending

worship is considered odd. What a pity and shame! Has your home been robbed of properly using the Lord's Day? Does everybody at your house know that the first day of the week is the day of worship before everything else, that it belongs to God, that it is a time for studying His Word, showing love for each other, attending to the soul?

Maybe you heard about the preacher announcing a most important business meeting to take place one Sunday afternoon. It so happened that the matter had to be decided but it was Super Bowl Sunday. The members were so overtaken in the world that this posed a problem for them. The preacher announced the meeting for six o'clock sharp and reminded brethren that it was one of the most important meetings in the history of the church. But then he added, "In case of overtime we will postpone the meeting until next week." This is the mentality of many today. Their homes have been invaded by the world, even things that are not sinful in themselves have pushed the primary things into second place. As I was growing up, nobody treated Sunday like just some other day. Even denominationalists had more respect than that. Today, however, you hear and see all kinds of activities accompanying neglect for the way of God. Yes, there may be times when "the ox is in the ditch," but if that persists, you either ought to sell the ox or fill up the ditch. This "sign of our times" is one of disregard toward the Almighty. And at your house, how is it?

Real Treasure

If your home has been robbed of its spiritual treasures, do not you think it is about time that they are either recovered, restored and protected? Has not the way of Satan been eroding the firm foundation of spirituality in your home long enough? It is time you "put your foot down" on the devil's neck, rearrange whatever needs to be rearranged so God gets first priority at your house. We put all kinds of alarms, window latches, lights, signals and warnings around the house to protect our physical properties. This is useful. But do not you think you need to pay more attention to the warnings coming your way about the spiritual robbery that may well be taking place right before you?

We do not have any recommendation for some new-fangled device to warn you of the devil or to keep him out of your home. The only device we know is the one that has worked everywhere it has been seriously and genuinely applied. That is

a good and regular serving of the Word of God. It is strange that the very thing that Satan wants to take from us the most is what can keep him from robbing us at all. We need a Christian oriented set of values, family worship, respect for the Lord's Day, two-way communication with God, example, discipline, respect for authority, thanksgiving at meals, character building in the home. The home will do more along these lines when the church will teach the home to fulfill its mission. Then things will be protected and preserved. The church cannot take the place of the home, nor can the church very often overcome the home and what the home does to its members.

Members of the home, mostly the parents, that have allowed Satan to take away what matters from the home can get these things back there if they will. But who will? That is up to each one. Unless you get and stay busy at the task your home will continue to be pillaged until it is spiritually impoverished. Then you can think about for eternity, in hell.

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(from page 24)

interested in them and would like to do this and ask them to please read them. Offer to discuss anything with them, answer their questions, try to find answers to whatever objections they may raise, but get them into the Bible this way. One tract each month to ten souls can teach a lot of truth in a year's time.

Get involved. Get involved in soul-winning. Try it. Your effort could mean the difference for somebody in eternity. "*Go, teach, baptize...*" is what our Lord commanded His apostles, and through them to us to take His message to a world that needs it.

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IT HAS ALWAYS PUZZLED ME

Here sits a congregation known to be digressive, liberal and constantly going off on doctrinal errors one after another. The preacher and elders all go along with just about anything except sound doctrine. And somebody says of one of the members, "But they are sound, aren't they?" If so, what are they doing giving support to such a congregation? Can anybody explain it?

Because of Baptism

The Scriptures teach that baptism is essential to salvation (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; First Peter 3:21; Galatians 3:27, and others). When we obey the Lord's command to be baptized we change our relationship with God. Whereas we were out of Christ and lost, at baptism we enter Christ and the company of the saved (Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27; Acts 2:47). It is in baptism that we meet the saving blood of Christ and our old sinful allegiances are cut and our new life in Christ begins. When one believes that Jesus is the Son of God, repents of his sins, confesses his faith in Christ, and is baptized into Christ for the remission of God, God adds him to His church, having washed away his past sins, counting him as His spiritual child, and the person starts toward heaven with the Lord.

But baptism also means other things. It means assuming obligations and responsibilities that he had not assumed before he was baptized. Surely, he was answerable unto God, but before baptism he had not decided to take on what God assigns him. While baptism is the final step one takes to get into Christ, it is the initiating step for the rest of life to live in keeping with the purposes and in harmony with the accomplishments of baptism.

New Life

Because of baptism the new Christian must walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-13). There is a new relationship that begins at baptism. He is now "*in Christ.*" The old life of sin is put behind him. At baptism he is given, as it were, a new and clean paper upon which to write his record of life. We assume the obligation to live a life in obedience to righteousness (Romans 6:16-18). This matter must be taken seriously.

The former life of sin, the old man, is put off and the new man is put on (Ephesians 4:22-24). Paul asked, "*How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*" (Romans 6:2). If one continued to live the same old sinful life after baptism that he lived before being baptized he would live inconsistently to the cleansing of baptism. Rather we are to abstain from evil (First Thessalonians 5:22), denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously and godly in the present world (Titus 2:12). We are to be transformed, living sacrifices for God

(Romans 12:1,2). Again, this must be taken seriously.

Nothing is more jarring and reprehensible than a baptized person living a sinful life and in sinful relationships. Baptism for the remission of sins gives us a new life and we are duty bound to live a Christlike life.

Unity in Christ

Because of baptism we must work for unity in Christ. After Paul tells us that we are baptized into Christ, he added, *"For ye are all one in Christ."* (Galatians 3:28). At baptism we are baptized into the one body (First Corinthians 12:13). When baptized we are added to His church (Acts 2:47). The church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23) and there is one body (Ephesians 4:4). There are many members in this body (Romans 12:4,5) but only one body (First Corinthians 12:12).

Paul corrected the Corinthian Christians for divisions that existed among them (First Corinthians 1:10) and taught them to be united. Paul told the church in Philippi, *"Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ, that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel."* (Philippians 1:27). Again, *"Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."* (Philippians 2:2).

If one allows himself to become the source of strife, division, dissension against the truth, being contentious, stubborn, demanding his own way in matters of opinion, with the attitude that demands conformity to him or he will ruin, lacking cooperation with his brethren, he has forgotten something significant about his baptism. It is the duty of every child of God to stand fast in the faith, and one part of that is to work for peace, harmony, oneness, togetherness, unity in the body of Christ based upon *"thus saith the Lord."* So serious is it to create divisions by false doctrines and self-appointed opinions, Paul warned, *"Now I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them."* (Romans 16:17). Such do not belong in the ranks of the faithful. In a season of digression, such as has existed among brethren for several decades now, such people may well be more numerous than those who will talk in oneness in the truth.

Regarding Worship

Baptism means you assume the duty and privilege to worship. One who has never been baptized has the duty to worship God because he has the duty to be baptized and the baptized one must worship God. A nonsensical doctrine now is heard among brethren that everything one does is worship. Such false teachers do not understand the distinction between glorifying God in all they do and worship. All worship, properly conducted, glorifies God. But we also glorify God in our life and service which is not the same as worship. All worship is service but not all service is worship. This is so obvious that it seems nobody ought have trouble with it except there be those who want to inject into worship innovations unauthorized of God and lay the foundation for it by falsely claiming everything you do is worship.

Those baptized in Acts 2 worshipped (Acts 2:42). The Christian is the only one who has the right to call God his spiritual Father. How could a child of the devil call God his Father? How could one who has rejected the death of Christ properly observe the Lord's Supper? How could one who has never obeyed the gospel sing the songs that speak of obeying the Master?

But just as it is inconsistent for one who persists living in sin to try to worship God, it is inconsistent for one who has been washed clean by the blood of Christ to neglect, refuse or make substitutions to worship God. We are to be present at the assemblies of the local church (Hebrews 10:25), offering sacrifices of praise (First Peter 2:5), worshipping in spirit and truth (John 4:24).

Growth

Because of baptism we are obligated to grow spiritually. We are born into the family of God at baptism (John 3:3-5), and as surely as a baby is born is expected to grow, so we are to grow as a child of God. Growing is not an optional matter but a command (Second Peter 3:18). Nobody considers a newborn child mature. No recently baptized person is a mature Christian. Baptism is not the end of things, but the beginning.

There are certain things one must know in order to become a Christian. Doubtless many have not been sufficiently taught, have been dunked in water, without realizing the step they were

supposed to have been taking. But one does not have to know everything to start being a Christian. But he cannot be content to remain a babe, either. We are to feed on the sincere milk of the word that we may grow thereby (First Peter 2:2). To refuse to study the Bible is to refuse to take spiritual nourishment by which we grow in the Lord. This is why faithful preachers of truth urge brethren to be present at Bible study periods, worship services, gospel meetings, studies at home, correspondence courses, reading good and sound Biblical material, etc.

Hebrews 5:12-14 talks about those who should be teachers but have not grown, are still unskillful in the word, still babes, not able to take the meat and are still on baby food.

Not Everything

Do not misunderstand. Baptism is very significant and essential to go to heaven because the Lord made it a condition, an act of submission and obedience to His will. But let us not attribute to baptism what it does not accomplish. Let us realize the duties we assume at baptism. Baptism is not the all-time cure for all things for the rest of life. It has its most important place in God's scheme of things. But when one is baptized, he must realize that this places him in a relationship and situation toward God that imposes duties and responsibilities that he dare not shirk. Too many teach that we cannot fall, but, after baptism many involve themselves so little in their duties that they act like they think they cannot be lost.

In summary, because of baptism and being forgiven of sins we are to strive to live a life void of sin.

Because of baptism we are united in Christ and should work for the unity of the body, the church, on the basis of truth.

Because of baptism God becomes our spiritual Father and we have the privilege and duty to worship, as He has directed.

Because of baptism we are born again and are new babes in the family of God, but we also assume the obligation to do all things that are necessary to grow spiritually in the Lord.

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be sure to see the back cover

Before and After God

"And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; among whom also we all had our conversation in time past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature the children of wrath even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ [by grace are ye saved], and hath raised us up together, and made us to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2:1-9).

Life and Death

We have presented to us two very opposite spiritual conditions; one of life and the other of death. These were the past and present states of those Paul wrote. The present state was life because they had been made alive or quickened. The past state was death because they were formerly separated from God. This has reference to spiritual life and death, not physical life and death, because the ones to whom the words were addressed were not physically dead. Spiritual death is caused by man's transgression of God's law (First John 3:4; Isaiah 59:1,2).

What is the difference between a trespass and a sin? In the long run, there is none. Both are violations of God's will and produce spiritual death. Some have reasoned that a trespass is a "minor" offense while that which is termed "sin" is a "major" offense. There is no justification for such reasoning. James 2:10,11 reads, *"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law."* To some adultery may not seem to be as bad as murder. Surely, the immediate consequences may not appear to

be as evil. One takes a person's life and the other destroys the body and virtue of two people. But both are sinful before God and violators will be condemned by Him if they are not forgiven.

A trespass is a violation of commission. One can sin by failing to do as he ought (James 4:17), or by doing as he ought not. A trespass is the latter. In either case, one has transgressed the law of God and God holds him or her responsible.

Before Being a Christian

Paul talked about their condition before they became Christians. They walked according to the evil ways of this world and the way of the devil. They had a spirit of disobedience. They lived to satisfy their appetites and lusts, in sensuality, following their own will. When one is spiritually dead he is like all others who are under wrath and condemnation of God. *"Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh... that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world."* (Ephesians 2:11,12).

Peter described one's spiritual state outside of Christ in First Peter 4:3,4, *"For the time past of our life will suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries, wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot speaking evil of you."*

Again, Ephesians 4:17,18 *"This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart."* Such passages define the spiritual state of those who have not yet come to Christ.

Now in Christ

But the ones in Ephesus to whom Paul wrote were in spiritual life. They had been brought over from the dominion of death to life. Like the ones in Colosse, they had been delivered from darkness and translated into the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). They were no more servants of sin, but servants of righteousness, as Paul mentioned in Romans 6:16-18).

To enjoy spiritual life is the result of being *"being raised up with Christ."* (Verse 6). Romans 6:3,4 teaches we are raised to walk in newness of life. Ephesians 4:22-24 teaches that we put off the old man of sin and put on the new man. Romans 6:8,9 teaches that Christ was raised from the dominion of death to life.

Consider the above passage closely. *"Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him; knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him."*

Romans 6:11, *"Likewise, reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."* Second Timothy 2:11, *"It is a faithful saying, For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him."*

Spiritual life means sitting in heavenly places, that is, in a state appointed by the will of heaven, a most desirable state. We have been lifted out of the ways of sin and the guilt of it, and have taken our places alongside the Lord and eventually, if faithful, in heaven itself. The spiritual life is a restoration of a happy, favorable unity and relationship with God. This is the state in which one must be when he dies if he is to go to heaven to God.

How It Was Done

What brought about this great difference between spiritual death and spiritual life? Verse four of Ephesians two tells us, *"But God..."* Here is the difference between what WAS and what IS. God makes the difference. Without God the former condition of spiritual death remains. With God we see the difference between death and life.

In Ephesians 4:22-24, to which we have referred, Paul speaks about being *"renewed in the spirit of your mind."* He speaks of putting on the new man, taking a new nature of righteousness, holiness, one of God's own creation. This difference was due to what God has done. Man has gone from being lost in sin to being saved in Christ and the glory, honor and credit belongs to God.

In what way has God made the difference? It was because of His rich mercy and His great love for man. God's love and mercy made the difference (Ephesians 2:4,5).

How has His love and mercy made the difference? It was because of Christ. The love and mercy of God was manifested in Christ. *"But now in Christ Jesus ye who were sometimes afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ."* (Ephesians 2:13).

There is no separation of the love and mercy of God from the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. We are saved by His mercy (Titus 3:3-7). He commended His loved toward us through the blood of Christ (Romans 5:6-9). Ephesians 2:16 teaches we are reconciled to God through the death of His Son. *"And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby."*

God, loving man even in his sinful condition and spiritual death, granted unto man an unearned, unmerited, undeserved favor. God, by His grace and not by man's own achievements, but through His Son, Jesus Christ, has provided the way of the rescue of man from spiritual death and paved the way for man to know and enjoy spiritual life. *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* (Romans 6:23).

Man's Past

Even though spiritual life is a gift that God gives, man still has a responsibility to receive and accept that which God offers. Ephesians 2:8 tells us, *"For by grace are ye saved through faith..."* We appropriate unto ourselves the benefits of the grace of God that have been provided through the blood of Christ by faith. We are delivered from sin when we obey that form of doctrine delivered (Romans 6:16-18). Christ is the author of salvation, but to whom and for whom? (Hebrews 5:9). He offers to all, but only those who obey shall reap the benefits. The fact that man is to obey what God has told him to do in no way diminishes the fundamental truth that salvation is due to the grace of God. It simply shows that salvation is not by grace alone, as some erroneously teach.

Our faith and obedience in no way earns God's gift. Our faith and obedience is simply God's way for us to receive the gift He gives. Faith, repentance, confession of Christ and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins brings us into contact with the saving blood of Christ, which God provided through His love, mercy and grace. We are his servants whom we obey (Romans 6:16). Even in our obedience, God is the One to Whom the credit belongs for man's salvation.

Now we can see more clearly the difference between spiritual life and spiritual death, and who makes the difference. It is a matter of BEFORE AND AFTER GOD. May these truths lend themselves to encouraging each one to believe and obey so the

gift of God can belong to them.

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The Seriousness Of Leadership

Some lessons run the risk of offending more than others. When you begin to talk about leadership, those who lead are often inclined to assume a very defensive posture and close their minds. Sometimes the families of leaders get terribly aggressive and hostile if anything is suggested that might cause someone to think their relative is not a capable leader. But let's face it. Much of the leadership in the church is far beneath the expectations of God and brethren. It is a serious problem in the Lord's church and has been throughout my years of preaching and long before that. But we must rise above personal pettiness and seek principles of truth regarding leadership in the church.

Every organization of people must have leadership, and the church is no exception. Of course, Christ is the head and through the inspired teaching of the Bible as given by inspired men we have our road map. But there are places of leadership that must be filled by men today. The governmental structure of the church calls for elders, deacons, preachers and teachers, and all these are people, just plain human beings that have to function in a capacity of leadership. We have more leaders than we might at first suspect. In addition to those named, and without special office, we have those who lead the congregation in song, prayer, who serve publicly in worship, who assume responsibilities that involve a number of other brethren. Each worker has his duty and influence. To assume a place of leadership, regardless of how "small" some may consider it, is a serious matter.

Need to Delegate

Moses once got bogged down trying to do more than he was

physically capable of doing and received advice to get help. He would remain as leader, but others would also lead in lesser capacities (Exodus 18; Numbers 11). When Moses was growing old and a successor was being considered, Moses told God, *"Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd."* (Numbers 27:16,17). It was recognized that there must be leadership, and there are several levels of leadership.

"Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the Lord. Therefore, this saith the Lord God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them. Behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the Lord." (Jeremiah 23:1,2).

This is a divine warning of desolation, misery, sorrow and impending doom upon those who are leaders who did not prove themselves to be the right kind of leaders. Israel of the north had already fallen before Assyria. Judah of the south was in steep decline. The spiritual state of the people was deplorable. They were as scattered sheep, even worse than scattered because they have been driven away. Who was responsible for all of this? God placed the burden upon the pastors, shepherds, the leaders of the people.

The Leaders

Who were these leaders? They were the priests that led the people in the rituals and gave the impression all was well because of the outward observance of forms of religion. But the manner of life of the people and priests made their observances an abomination before God.

Their leaders were also the prophets who prophesied falsely concerning good things to come in order to please the powers in office and pacify the masses of unsettled and sinful people. They told their hearers what the hearers wanted to hear rather than what they needed to hear, just like a lot of preachers today. They failed to proclaim the truth and protect and preserve the spiritual welfare of people. They lined their own pockets with money, power and prestige. They were so like many today who fill pulpits and lull people into an unjustified security just so long as they get their pay, which too often is more than any man on

earth is worth. Preachers can be and have been bought.

Their leaders were also the princes, rulers and elders of the people who had authority. They shirked their duty, closing their eyes to evil rather than leading the nation into righteousness. They had not *“visited”* the flock, that is, provided and cared for them as their duty demanded of them. They were more concerned for themselves and their positions than they were the fortunes of the nation and the generations yet to come.

The Result

The result was that Judah had come to a sorry state of spiritual decay, ignorance, lethargy, complacency toward righteousness, committing sin without pain of conscience. They were on the brink of destruction, having wasted their talents and about to be overcome by their enemies. It was because of the reprehensible leadership that went before them.

James 3:1, *“My brethren, be not many of you masters [teachers], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.”* This might seem to discourage people from being leaders, but that is not the purpose of the passage. It is designed to provoke leaders to take their work seriously. Why? Because they have greater opportunities, heavier responsibilities, therefore, have more for which they must give account. To whom much is given, much is required.

Souls are dependent upon leaders being and doing what they ought to be. When the blind leads the blind, they both shall fall into the pit. Ezekiel was instructed to be a watchman. If the watchman failed, not only the watchman would suffer, but the whole city (Ezekiel 33:1-9).

Right Place but Wrong Person

Because leadership is such a serious matter, no person ought ever be placed in a work for which he shows inadequate qualifications. Men have been made elders and deacons and placed in pulpits for such reasons as having money, being popular, because of political back-scratching of those already in leadership, family ties, other such things, without proper consideration of the spiritual qualifications a leaders ought to have. The church always suffers, not just for a while, but for years, when that occurs in a congregation. There are few things worse in a congregation than having the wrong man in the right

place. The desolation lasts for years, maybe even generations. If an unqualified person is suggested for leadership, for God's sake and the sake of brethren as well as the man, do not put him in leadership. If such a man is already there, try to dislodge him without tearing up the whole church. He is, was, and will forever be a hindrance. We recognize this fact in every other realm of life, in factories, businesses, schools, teams, whatever. Why is that so hard to understand in the Lord's church?

No person ought to assume leadership that cannot and will not function. You may have heard the story of the football player named Leroy. The team was taking and sever licking and every runner was being smeared unmercifully. But the coach knew that Leroy was a good runner, and kept yelling to the team in the huddle to give the ball to Leroy. Time and again they gave the ball to somebody else with disastrous results to the man and team. With the coach still yelling to give the ball to Leroy, one player finally yelled back, "Leroy said he didn't want that ball." Some want it and ought not be allowed to carry it. Others that can carry it often are not willing to do it. Neither one ought to be given the ball.

Pillars in the Church

Someone once defined an elder as a pillar in the church. He sure was. He held up just about everything anybody ever wanted to do. It may sound needless to say, but by all means should men be put in leadership who will uphold God's truth and who tell the truth. It may sound impossible, but some of the biggest liars I have ever met on this earth were serving as elders in the church. This I know for a fact. They will compromise God's truth to squirm around to have their own way and be acceptable to those around them. I have seen it happen time and again. It is required of elders to be able to convict the gainsayers (Titus 1:9), by the use of sound doctrine. How can one do that who is not acquainted with sound doctrine, but runs to his favorite (liberal) preacher, some college president, his wife, or some other "advisor" every time he has to take a stand? Surely, others can help him. But eventually he must learn the difference between truth and error and stand up and be counted for truth. So many just shy away and timidly, cowardly, refuse to even defend the faith. A leader must be able to stand for the truth, buy the truth and sell it not, defend it, fight for it, teach it, live it, and never compromise it.

A leader must be enthusiastic about his leadership role. They have to be out front. You cannot lead where you will not go. Leadership is not given to a man to honor him, as some must evidently think. It is to get a job done. Leadership is a work to do, not simply a position to hold. If a man cannot get behind a work, he sure does not belong out in front of it. No church can move forward with only brakemen and nobody knowing how to work the throttle.

Every leader, regardless of how "small" his lead, ought to be an example. He ought to attend the services faithfully. His attitude and spirit of cooperation ought manifest Christianity. He must be loyal to the local work where he leads. We cannot win battles with disloyal soldiers and we cannot win battles when leadership cannot show how the fight is to be waged. If a person cannot conduct his life as a faithful Christian, he surely ought to step out of the way when it comes to leadership. It is terrible to have some man who will not pay his debts to be an elder. It is tragic for some adulterer, or one with a foul mouth, to be leading singing or prayers. Sometimes dishonest men are leading the church. What can you expect people to think of the church in situations like that? This idea that some have to give a person a class or make him an elders and maybe he will start being faithful is the devil's folly, but often followed. "Let's make him an elder and maybe he will stop criticizing." What on earth gets into people's minds to think like that? Yet, that has been heard and obviously been done.

Time to Step Aside

When a man is hindered through health, family, business, whatever, from doing what he must do as a leader, why does he not show love for the Lord and His people to get out of the leadership? While none are perfect nor are expected to be, the brethren have a right to expect one in leadership to give the time, energy, effort, whatever it demands or let another take the reins. One of the greatest retarding factors to the steadfastness and aggressiveness of a church is a leader who will not function, whatever be the reason. The seriousness of leadership demands he either be at it or get out of it.

The Lord knows the value of experience. This is why older men of training and experience are chosen as leaders. Novices do not belong at the head of the line. Just as Christians are to grow, so are leaders. It is no disgrace for someone to be more

mature than you, but it is a disgrace to remain immature. The five talent man gained more talents than the two talent man, but both were blessed because both did what they could.

Sometimes a congregation is ahead of its leadership. Like the story of a man running through the streets and asking if the people had seen a group pass that way. When asked why he wanted to know, he responded, "I am their leader." Some leader he was! They were far ahead of him. It is no disgrace to be a one talent man if you are busy using your talent. But we ought not place a one talent man in a five talent job. Biblical qualifications for elders, for instance, are there for a reason. We have no right to set them aside to accomodate anything or anybody. When the work gets bigger than the leadership, the leaders ought to have the work at heart, secure help, or step down. But the sad story usually is that so many who lead think they have a divine title to rank and power and they hold it until they destroy everything around them.

Help or Hindrance

The problem so often is that the man who is a hindrance to the work does not recognize it. He needs to be helped to do a better job or given help to recognize he needs to get out of the way. We do not suggest "getting rid" of anybody. That smacks of a bad attitude. We are suggesting that the cause of Christ is a most serious business. A person is no more "once an elder, always an elder" than once saved, always saved. We do not endorse the view some have adopted to let elders serve for a year or two and then they are automatically removed. This would breed politics, cause some to ever be trying to win favor at whatever cost. Running for office is not the way. Some would be glad to remove sound, faithful men in order to bring their digression into the church. But it is far better to get the right man in the right place of leadership, whatever the level and duty, than it is to have to get the wrong man out.

Those who assume leadership may be assuming great opportunities to work for the Lord, or they may be taking on their spiritual death warrant. Leadership is a most serious matter. More care should be given to it.

† † † † †

Operation Involvement

This lesson is intended to plant in the heart two or three truths and suggest ways we can put these truths into constructive action. Unless we act on truth, truth will be limited in effect.

"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature." Bible students recognize Mark 16:15. Also, *"And the things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."* (Second Timothy 2:2). *"Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word."* (Acts 8:4). These three verses have a common theme; namely, telling others the story of God's relationship to man and preaching the gospel of salvation.

Someone has said, "You are interested only as you are involved." That is certainly true when it comes to saving souls from hell. One of our deficiencies in the church today is the relatively small number of us involved in leading others to Christ. We often refer to this effort as personal work, but it does not fully express our duty.

There are many methods of teaching the gospel to the sinful world. Person to person is one way of going into all the world. It is a way of showing individual concern for the spiritual welfare of others. We do have the obligation to tell others of Christ. Without that knowledge, they cannot believe, obey and be saved. While some will not hear and will reject the gospel, there are some who will hear and heed if we take the truth to them. Regardless of what they do with the truth, we still have the duty to take it to them.

Too often we erect church buildings, teach classes, have preaching twice on Sunday, conduct Vacation Bible Schools, one or two gospel meetings a year, distribute printed material, make announcements, all of which we commend. But the attitude sometimes seems to be, "Well, here it is for them. Let them come and get it." We agree that they ought to come and get it. But most will not. We have to take it to them. "Go" is the very first command of the great commission Jesus gave.

Personal Work

This phrase has been coined, "I don't care how much you

know until I know how much you care.” Personal contact is a way of showing we care, and offers an opportunity to tell the message others need to know about Christ.

Christ was a “personal worker.” Christianity is a very personal matter. We shall stand before God individually. One soul is worth more than the whole world. Some of the great lessons of Jesus recorded in the Bible were taught to just one person, like the water of life to the woman at Jacob’s well, the new birth to Nicodemus, salvation to the house of Zachaeus.

The early church were personal workers. Philip taught the Ethiopian (Acts 8). Acts 5:42, *“And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”*

When persecuted and scattered they went everywhere teaching and preaching.

When in the better land,
Before the bar we stand,
How deeply grieved our souls will be;
If any lost one there
Should cry in deep despair,
You never mentioned Him to me.
You helped me not the light to see.
You met me day by day,
You knew I was astray.
Yet, you never mentioned Him to me.

No preacher or group of others can do what you can do. Each one needs to be involved in leading others to salvation. Can we be content to just invite them to attend our services and let them go at that? Maybe that is all they will let you do. But how many of us are trying to do more than that? We do not want to get the idea that going to heaven involves just being baptized and sitting down. We are God’s watchmen and workers. Are we doing our job?

Why are we not more involved in personal work? Some lack knowledge and do not try. But you can tell people what you did to become a Christian. Knowledge is something that can be gained with study. You do not have to know everything to know something. Tell others what you know of the Lord.

Requires Time

It takes time and too many are too busy in too many things to

take the time to show concern for the souls of others. Are you not glad that others did not so occupy themselves that they never showed any interest in you? Are you not glad somebody encouraged you, taught you, persuaded you to obey the gospel? Why not do as much for somebody else?

Most of us possibly feel that we have “done our part” when we attend the services of the church, or extend an invitation. That is well and good as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. No person can give himself or herself totally to one area of effort. But the sad truth is, many look to the preacher to do the personal work for the congregation just like they look to him to have the sermons and classes. Personal work is something all can and should do, if only we would.

We get discouraged when it seems that nobody is very interested in studying the Word of God. But it is our task to try to get them to listen. Be prepared for many to turn you down. But somewhere, someone, someday might be in heaven because you did not quit trying because some turned you down. Regardless of how the other person reacts to the gospel, we still have the duty to take the gospel to him or her. After we have done that, and tried to win the soul to Christ, then we are sad if they reject it, but we are glad because we tried.

Success

When you try, you cannot fail. This may sound like you should expect a convert everytime. We should. But that is not our point. Many times you will try, teach, persuade, and nothing seems to come of it. But even when you are turned down, you have not failed. You may not have reached every goal that you set. You may not have achieved everything you wanted. But you have not failed. Trying is a large measure of success. Trying means that you have obeyed a divine command to take the truth to another. That cannot be checked off as a total failure.

Some will be better at this type of work than others. Some are better preachers than others. Thankfully, men do not have to wait until they are the best preacher in the world before they try. We are not going to be judged according to what the other fellow does anyway, but according to what we do in relation to what we could have done.

If you cannot sing like angels,
If you cannot preach like Paul,

You can tell the love of Jesus,
You can say He died for all.

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

We doubt that anybody really disagrees with anything that has been suggested and taught here. But what are we going to do about it? We are trying to show interest in others through visitation programs, attending the sick, reaching absentees, the wayward and non-members. We do not want to neglect these dear people. But we do not have to have some high-powered, highly organized machinery and system for individual Christians to get busy winning souls. Possibly it is expedient to have someone constantly pushing the effort and reminding others to work; even helping them when needed. But this comes down to the individual Christian doing an individual task. What are we going to do about it?

Suggestions

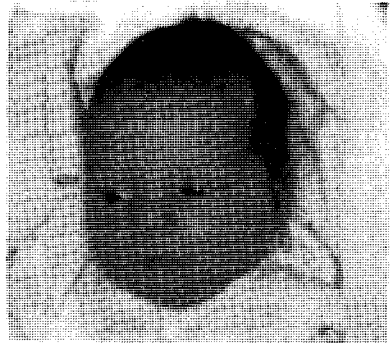
You might begin by building a good tract library and giving tracts to others on a regular basis. Some even have set up tract distribution points throughout the city where they live and have taken the job to keep them filled. This might well produce some personal contacts for additional study.

You might ask if you can visit a person in whom you have interest and when you get there ask him or her his thoughts about the church, Christ, sin, salvation, heaven, hell, the gospel, etc. Find out if he is interested, what he knows, what he needs to know, and let him know you want him to go to heaven. All of the efforts we can make, through the media, pulpits, classes, gospel meetings, etc., none seem to get to the people quicker than sitting down with them and sincerely discussing the teaching of the Bible.

Private Bible studies cannot be beat as a method of carrying the gospel to the lost world. But one point of emphasis this lesson want to make has to do with tracts. Would you send ten people one tract per month for the next year? First, you read the tract and know what you are sending. Tell them you are

(continued page 6)

Daniel Briggs Boyd



This fine young fellow was born October 9, 1989 to Stephen and Carol and is our seventh grandchild, the fifth grandson. He lives in McMinnville with his parents, sister (Allison) and brother (Tyler). You can imagine the joy and excitement his arrival has produced for everyone in the Boyd family as well as Martha Corlew, his maternal grandmother. We and Martha are in full agreement that Daniel has wonderful parents and is a blessed child.

As is true with all of our precious children and grandchildren, our fervent prayers shall rise daily on his behalf as they have since the day we learned he was coming. What a wonderful child has come to us!

* * * * *

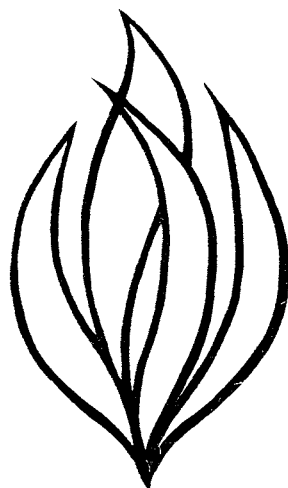
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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).



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Apostasy, Reformation and Restoration

We wish to trace Biblical and historical facts regarding the church to help us appreciate the efforts to restore New Testament Christianity in our own sin-sick world. We want to explain why there is so much religious confusion and division and where all the many churches had their origin. We want to warn faithful brethren that if we fail to adhere to the faith of God and cease to demand Biblical authority for what we teach, preach and practice we shall bring another digression and apostasy upon future generations.

The church began on the first Pentecost after the ascension of Christ (Acts 2). Guided by the apostles as they were guided by the Holy Spirit the church grew and numbers were multiplied. Christians followed the inspired directions given them.

The government of the church of Christ was Christ as the head (Ephesians 1:22,23). Local congregations, independent of one another, organizationally, were formed wherever groups of Christian lived. These congregations were overseen by elders or bishops, served by deacons, preacher and teachers and all the other members making up the membership of the local church. Other than Christ as the head and the authority of Christ through the apostles as the rule, there was no ecclesiastical structure of the church.

The rule of faith was the inspired word of God, no more and no less. They walked according to the word delivered them. The message was the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11).

The worship was simple, plain and according to divine guidance. They partook of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week, had music in worship which was always singing, gave of their means, studied God's word and prayed to God.

The terms of admission into the church were the same terms of salvation. The church is the body of Christ, the company of the saved (Acts 2:47; Ephesians 5:23). What one did to be saved was the same thing one did to become a member of the church, the saved. There was no such doctrine that you did one thing to be saved and something else and different to join the church of your choice. That is a false doctrine promoted later by denominationalists who neither understand the New Testament

church nor have proper respect for the Biblical teaching concerning it.

The standard of measure for life was determined by the word of God. The brethren were tied together by a common faith and love, in the fellowship as sons and daughters of God, of one accord, one mind, the same doctrine, name, practice, as saints of God, imperfect but striving to imitate Christ. When they erred they were corrected. When they walked faithfully, they were commended. As we read of these corrections and commendations we can know what pleases and displeases God even today. The church grew and the gospel was preached to the whole world (Colossians 1:23).

Apostasy

But there came a falling away from God's truth. Space prohibits quoting all the passages that affirm this and predicted its coming. Some of the scriptures we need to consider are Matthew 7:15-20; Acts 20:28-31; Second Thessalonians 2:1-2; First Timothy 4:1-3; Second Timothy 4:3,4; Second Peter 2:1,2. Because of the predictions of apostasy Paul urged, *"Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good."* (Second Thessalonians 5:21). John wrote, *"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God."* He continues by telling why he urged this. *"Because many false prophets are gone out into the world."* (First John 4:1). This array of scriptures ought to forever silence the false teachers who teach that one cannot fall once he has been saved. Nothing is more misleading than such false teaching. The presence of warnings is enough to know the reality of the possibility to fall.

This divinely predicted apostasy did not occur quickly nor in a brief span of time, but over many years, even centuries. It gradually developed as all digressions and apostacies do. This is the reason so many are blinded to the reality of the drift of things today. They see only the here and now without considering the trends and directions taken.

There was a change in the government of the church. There was disrespect for God's arrangement of a plurality of elders over one congregation, and there developed one elder or bishop over a plurality of congregations. What digressive men devised was just the opposite of God's way. There finally arose five areas that were involved in a great power struggle for supremacy. These five were Jerusalem, Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria

and Antioch. Through a series of military and political events, these five were narrowed to two, Rome and Constantinople.

The "bishop" of Constantinople, John the Faster, in the year 588, declared himself the universal bishop. This angered Gregory the Great, "bishop" of Rome, who described such a position and title as presumptuous, anti-Christian, blasphemous, infernal, diabolical, vain and bold. You get the idea that he opposed it. Yet, the successor to Gregory, Boniface the Third, laid claim to the title himself, and with the aid of Phocas, emperor of Rome, made it stick whereas John the Faster faded. Hence, we have the first Roman pope in the year 606 A.D. There was this gradual development of an ecclesiastical hierarchy and special clergy and priesthood of which the New Testament reveals nothing.

There was departure from the simple doctrine of Christ with the introduction of many human doctrines and superstitions, such as the sale of indulgences, religious holy days, relics, purgatory, holy water, celibacy for the priesthood, burning of candles, instrumental music, sprinkling for baptism, auricular confession to the priests, transubstantiation, and on and on.

There was the wholesale departure from the Bible as authority. Alongside the Bible was placed creeds, edicts of councils, popes, synods and traditions. Things reached the point that there was little to no similarity between what was then called "Christian" and what the New Testament described as Christian. This Roman Catholic power dominated the scene for many years. It is the period of history that historians call "the dark ages," but which Catholic historians call "the golden age of the church."

Attempts to Reform

Into this hideous religious tyranny and darkness came men like Martin Luther, a Roman priest. He strongly opposed the errors of Romanism and spoke out against them. He was certainly not the first to oppose the dictatorial rule of Rome. Before him were people called the Albigenses and Waldensians who lived four hundred years before Luther. They resisted the apostasy, but were exterminated, banished and persecuted out of existence. There was John Wycliffe, who translated the Bible for the common man. His action was so resented by the powers of Rome that forty-four years after his death his bones were dug up, burned, and the ashes scattered into a river. This shows how

intense were the actions of Rome against efforts to reform it and bring the Bible back as the guide.

John Huss, another Roman priest, was strangled and burned at the stake when he denounced Roman error in 1415. William Tyndale, in the late fourteen hundreds and just prior to Luther, gave the world a translation of the Bible the common people could have and read. For his efforts he was also strangled and burned at the stake.

But Martin Luther was the most prominent of those who attempted to reform Romanism that had become contaminated with almost every kind of doctrinal and moral error one could imagine. Partly due to his own courage and convictions and partly due to German warlords who sought deliverance from Rome politically, Martin Luther was able to oppose Rome and survive. He nailed ninety-five theses on the door of a Catholic Church showing the errors of Romanism. He also publicly burned the excommunication papers the pope sent to him. While he never left the Roman church, he made great attempts to reform that church. Because of his partial success, and his efforts, the movement that is called the Reformation Movement is usually dated from him.

Other great reformers were John Knox, John Calvin, Ulrich Swingli, John Wesley and a host of others. But the early efforts were slow to take hold and the breaking of the grip that Rome had on the world was difficult. But it gradually developed.

Confusion and Division

The results of the Reformation Movement are mixed. There was a breath of fresh air that swept over the religious world as people began reading the Bible and seeing the difference between what was and what ought to have been. But there was also the introduction of denominationalism with parties forming after this man, that man, this doctrine, that doctrine, this place, that place. Division became the norm among opponents of Rome. Whereas Luther never wanted to establish another church, his followers did just that. Whereas the rule of the pope was displaced with many, the rule of other men took place. The result grew until it is evident that the Reformation Movement produced another gigantic error just as bad as Romanism. Protestant denominationalism has no more Biblical basis than does Roman Catholicism. Down through the years came the Lutheran Church, 1530; Presbyterian, 1536; Episcopal, 1534;

Baptists, 1611; Methodists, 1739; Congregational, 1581; until now there are literally hundreds of denominations, each with its own name, doctrines peculiar to itself, practices that contradict the Bible and other denominations, and, what is most serious, religions that have no foundation in the revelation of God but have come from the minds of men.

This division and confusion paved the way for atheism, humanism, skepticism, modernism, and a denial of just about everything that the Bible identifies as being of Christ. One of the tragedies today is how people generally have no Biblical concept of what Christianity is supposed to be. They look at Romanism and Protestant denominationalism and call that "Christian." But that is not what Christ established nor endorsed.

Restoration

In our land of religious freedom, where men could speak and write as they saw fit, a blessing that was often denied people in Europe under Roman and Protestant domination, honest and sincere people began to turn to the New Testament. They studied and learned how foreign all of that in the religious world really was to God's word. They took the Bible as the sole authority in religion just as the Bible demands. They began to call for people to "*speak as the oracles of God*," and abandon their denominations for the church revealed in the Bible. They started what is sometimes called the Restoration Movement. James O'Kelley, 1792, a Methodist in Virginia and North Carolina, declared that the Bible should be the only guide. Independently, and unknown to him, there were men like Elias Amith and Abner Jones, New England Baptists, had come to the same conviction and denounced the divisive human creeds that governed denominations. Barton W. Stone of Kentucky and Maryland, a Presbyterian, gave leadership to the movement of returning to the Biblical truth regarding Christ and His church. Later, Thomas and Alexander Campbell were prominent in writing, speaking, debating and preaching for a return to the "*old paths*" of New Testament Christianity. They urged all men to speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent. Authority was the crucial issue and these people cited the Scriptural claim for the Bible as authority.

From many faiths, different areas, emerged people of like faith and convictions, taking nought but God's word, planting the "*seed of the kingdom*," the word of God, in the hearts and

minds of honest and good people who wanted God's word above the word of men, preaching, teaching, believing, obeying what the Bible taught, without addition and subtraction. They wore the same name as the early Christians, taught the same doctrine, formed the same governmental arrangement, upheld the same terms of entrance, stressed the same standard of life, preached the same truth. As Peter had command, *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God."* (First Peter 4:11).

Result

The result was the only result one can expect from such an effort. When the truth is sown in the hearts of people, heard, believed and obeyed, it produces Christians and the church of Christ. That is always the result. Not until men sow the tares of human doctrines can one produce denominations. Seed produces after its kind. The word of God produces the saved, the church for which Christ shed His blood (Acts 20:28). Wherever, whenever, whosoever will take God's word and that without addition and subtraction, without alteration and innovation, there will be Christians, the like and kind of the New Testament.

This is the plea of faithful churches of Christ today. It is one of life's greatest blessings to have the opportunity to uphold the truth of the Bible without the infractions of human doctrines. It is the work of restoring New Testament Christianity according to Scripture. The Bible claims to be God's inspired word, infallible, all-sufficient, inerrant, authoritative (Second Timothy 3:16,17), and it is the work of the church to preach and teach that word (First Timothy 3:15). It is the plea to go back behind the confusion and division of denominationalism, back behind the tyranny and dictatorial policies of Romanism, back behind the reformatory efforts of well-meaning men, back behind the apostasy that the apostles predicted, all the way back to the church of the New Testament that began in Jerusalem and then restore New Testament Christianity as the Lord delivered it. When people today will do what they did then, teach what they taught then, believe what they believed then, obey what they obeyed then, practice what they practiced then, they will be what they were then. What were they? They were Christians, the church, the saved, God's kingdom, the redeemed, children of God and His family.

Why should not the world have the opportunity to know,

believe and obey the truth without the soil of Romanism, Protestantism, creedalism, modernism, humanism and every other Satanic "ism" that has plagued mankind and damned his soul? We are of the conviction the world needs this.

We do not want another church, but the New Testament church, patterned according to that which is revealed in the Bible. God help us work for that, live for that, even die for that if need be. Our souls, and the souls of many that follow after us, depend upon it.

† † † † †

The Seven Ones

Lesson One

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all." (Ephesians 4:1-6). Our study of this text shall be presented in two lessons. We now consider the part that is certainly an admonition to those of us who are Christians.

The child of God is to walk worthy of the vocation. His vocation is his employment, his occupation, his profession, that which one does in response to a call to action. The Christian is called to serve God through Christ. Christianity is the imitation of Jesus and is to be the number one occupation of the child of God. Paul urges brethren to live up to that calling.

God Calls; Man Answers

Our call comes to us by the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14). The gospel is the good news of Christ. That gospel calls mankind to enlist in the army of the Lord that we might obtain glory. Learning that we are sinners and need the Savior, learning that Jesus Christ is the only Savior, we are called to

Him by His invitation to be saved. When we obey the terms of pardon as given in the gospel we thereby answer His call (First Peter 3:21). God calls and we must answer. He calls by the gospel and we answer by obedience. This call comes through the Word (Romans 10:17) rather than some kind of direct operation of the Holy Spirit, something strange, mysterious, better felt than told or a still small voice alongside some "experience."

Having responded to that call, we are to possess certain qualities, such as humility, gentleness, patience, a forgiving spirit, love. We are to spare no effort to keep the peace by maintaining unity. Paul makes a special plea for unity in verse three. Making this effort and keeping that as a goal will produce peace one with another. Peace is the result of genuine unity and oneness. As men draw closer to God they draw closer to each other. Men can have peace with each other and not be close to God. But the peace that Paul urges is peace that results from unity because men are close to God.

Having made this plea for unity, Paul presents the basis of unity and the oneness of certain essentials of Christianity. Inasmuch as oneness exists in these essentials, we ought to work for oneness among ourselves.

One Body

There is one body. What did Paul mean by the term "body?" Colossians 1:18, *"He is the head of the body, the church."* First Corinthians 12:27, *"Now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular."* This was written to the members of the church in Corinth. In this epistle of our text, Ephesians 1:22,23, *"And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all thing to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."* The teaching is clear. The body is the church and there is one body, therefore, there is one church. Those who accept the teaching of the Bible have no problem with that even in the midst of the existence of many churches in the denominational world. We accept the truthfulness, power and authority of this teaching and reject denominationalism because of it. While many contend that one church is as good as another, Paul says there is only one. We believe Paul. True enough, one denomination is as good as another. But there is one body which is the church and it is not a denomination nor has kinship with denominationalism.

Our understanding is enlarged in Ephesians 2:13-16, "*But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace, and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby.*" There is one church and there is to be oneness in the church among the saved that compose the church.

Prior to the cross the Jews and Gentiles were estranged, there being a wall between them. That wall was the Law of Moses. One race was chosen through which the Savior was to come. The others were "*aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*" (Ephesians 2:12). When Jesus died on the cross, that which divided them was removed (Colossians 2:14). The cross was the means of reconciliation among men as well as between men and God. This reconciled state is enjoyed in the one body which is the church. We are there united with God and brought into fellowship with Him and the saved. Peace among men and peace with God is in the church. It is here that men have beaten their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruninghooks (Isaiah 2:4).

The church has many members, but there is only one body (Romans 12:4,5). The church is composed of people; a people who have obeyed the gospel and walk faithfully therein. The glory of the church is seen in the fact that being in the body is the same as being in Christ. "*We being many are one body in Christ.*" (Romans 12:5). We are baptized into one body (First Corinthians 12:13). We are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27). Being in Christ is important because salvation is in Christ (Second Timothy 2:10). There is no condemnation in Christ (Romans 8:1). All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). The saved are added to the church (Acts 2:47), which is the one body. There are no saved outside of the church of Christ. Christ is the Savior of the body (Ephesians 5:23).

While the religious world agonizes in discord and division, the Bible continues to teach the way of unity in the body, the church. This is the unity for which Christ prayed (John 17:21). Paul condemned division (First Corinthians 1:10). The inspired answer to division is the one body. Those who teach there is

one church teach truth. Those who teach otherwise teach error.

One Spirit

There is one Spirit. This is reference to the Holy Spirit, the One who is often referred to as the third person of the Godhead. To say He is the "third" person is not intended to relegate Him to a position of inferiority, but only to take note that three persons compose the One Godhead or Deity. It is but a manner of speaking of Him as is done in Matthew 28:19, 20 and Second Corinthians 13:14 where all three are mentioned, the Father, son and Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit was active in the creation (Genesis 1:1,2). *"The Spirit of the Lord moved across the face of the waters."* The Holy Spirit is active in the work of the redemption of man. He guided the apostles following the ascension of Christ as promised (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13ff). His guidance was through the word given (Acts 2:4; First Corinthians 2:6-8, 10, 12-13). He conducted the writing of the Scriptures (First Peter 1:20,21; Second Timothy 3:16,17). The Holy Spirit is active in every conversion, operating by and through the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, which was given by the Spirit.

We should also note that the Holy Spirit is not some powerful "it." Repeatedly there is the use of the personal pronouns with reference to Him. This designates Him as a person, with personality, a living being of Deity. Many false doctrines have arisen out of the misunderstanding that the Holy Spirit is only some kind of glorified, supercharged influence or power and nothing more.

One Hope

There is one hope. Our calling, having come through the gospel that was delivered through the Spirit, provides us with hope. Anyone without hope is to be pitied. Those who have hope are truly blessed.

Paul wrote, *"For we are saved by hope."* (Romans 8:24). There is the necessity of remaining faithful having once come to Christ. The hope that is extended to us keeps us motivated to remain faithful and in this way we are saved by hope. Hope is a gift from God (Second Thessalonians 2:16). It is called the helmet of salvation (First Thessalonians 5:8; Ephesians 6:6). The Lord has given exceeding great and precious promises

(Second Peter 1:4), and we expect the fulfillment of these promises that God has given to those who come to Him through His only begotten Son. Destroy the hope of the Christian and you destroy the appeal of Christ.

Our hope is not on material things, but spiritual. While we are promised God's providence in that which He sees we need (Matthew 6:33), we have not been promised luxury and material wealth. It is a glaring and materialistic error of some religious charlatans that would extend to mankind the idea that serving God will necessarily get them a bigger house, nicer car, finer clothes and more money from a better job. This is rank materialism and contradicts what the Lord promises.

The hope of the Christian transcends the fleeting, temporal, unstable, perishable offerings of this world. Our hope is not so small, limited and confined (Matthew 6:19). Our hope looks upward and outward, beyond the tribulations, troubles, frustrations, woes, temptations, sadnesses and hurts of this earthly life. "Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness." Our hope is that after the battles of this life are over, we shall live eternally with God and the redeemed in heaven for ever and ever with end, where there is nothing to mar our joy. It is this hope that keeps our determination alive and fresh. We know that with God we can overcome the world, and all that would seek to destroy us, even death and Satan.

Paul had this hope in his heart. *"For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."* (Second Timothy 4:6-8). The same hope that burned so intensely within him, burns in the hearts of faithful Christians today. It is that hope that encourages, strengthens, motivates God's people. It gives us power to endure and the resolution to remain loyal and steadfast in faithfulness. Yes, the heavenly home, the hope of the soul, sure and steadfast, is the one hope of which Paul writes by inspiration (First Thessalonians 4:13ff). The remaining four "ones" shall be discussed in the next lesson.

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The Seven Ones

Lesson Two

This is the second of a two-part study of the seven ones that are listed by Paul in Ephesians 4:1-6. We have considered the first three, plus the opening admonition to the Christian to develop certain characteristics and acquire certain qualities necessary to walk or live as a Christian ought.

One Lord

There is one Lord. The word "Lord" means Master. This might have been very strange to hear by people who were accustomed to having many masters, lords, gods, and worshipping them. The Ephesians had a goddess, the idol Diana, that they worshipped more than any other of their gods.

God has crowned His Son as King of kings and Lord of lords (First Timothy 6:15). This passage shows that if Jesus is King, He is also Lord and vice versa. Inasmuch as there is one Lord, and Jesus is that Lord, then it follows that Jesus is also King, now, and out goes the false doctrine that teaches He has not yet established His kingdom. This very moment Jesus is ruling and reigning over His kingdom as King.

The Christian has no other Lord that he serves. God has not appointed nor allowed any earthly dignitary nor heavenly host to even so much as represent the one Lord as to share His rule and authority. At this moment, Christ is at the right hand of God (Acts 2:34; Hebrews 1:13; Colossians 3:1). This phrase designates the highest rank and authority, unsurpassed by any other and equaled by none. Jesus is as Peter announced on Pentecost, "*That God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye crucified, both Lord and Christ.*" (Acts 2:36).

This being true, we dare not exalt any above Him. The Humanistic heresy that exalts "man as the most" is contradictory to Christianity. We dare not trifle with the word of the King. We must respect His authority (Colossians 3:17). There is not any command that we can consider optional and unimportant. There is no promise or warning that we should not heed. He is Lord of all and there is the one Lord, Jesus the Christ.

It is this same Lord before whom we shall stand in judgment and be judged according to His words (John 12:48). While the

world struggles over what shall be religious authority, Paul settled the matter here in the affirmation that there is one Lord.

One Faith

There is one faith. How can that be, seeing that there are so many faiths in the world today? Is not that terribly narrow? We must admit that it is narrow. But truth always is narrow. The statement of Paul is a great distance away from what most believe, even many who call themselves Christians, but who really are just members of denominations of which the Bible never speaks. Often people are heard to ask, "Of what faith are you?" They ask as if one was as good as another, or as if God approves more than one. The world is very mixed up on religious views because people have not believed this statement of Paul that there is one faith.

The world, and its leaders, will advise, "Choose the faith of your choice." But never did Christ nor those authorized to speak by His authority or on His behalf teach such a thing. So many have just accepted the idea that we have a choice and they never question the propriety of it. What people need to be encouraged to do is to seek God's choice and follow that. The scripture teaches there is one faith.

Jude three urges us to contend for THE faith. Paul said he had kept THE faith (Second Timothy 4:7). THE faith is God's one great system, plan, program, scheme of redemption, the gospel, the doctrine of Christ. This is not of man's origin (Galatians 1:11,12), but for man's benefit. That faith is THE faith of which Christ is the author.

This means that Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, all the other religions that are found in our world are not of God. One cannot be faithful to the religion of Christ and contend that anybody can reach God through any other faith. This includes Masonry as well as other religions some try to follow alongside the religion of Christ. Man's desire to please himself and his neighbor has often caused him to compromise this truth, but this truth cannot be changed. God has spoken.

There are those who would contend that the faith of Christ is the only faith but would at the same time contend that all the various denominational faiths are acceptable before God. The burden of proof that this assumption is true rests upon those who so contend. Show it from the Bible! Paul said there is one faith. What right does anyone have to say there are more?

One Baptism

There is one baptism. Inasmuch as seven baptisms are mentioned in the Bible, it may sound strange to read that there is (present tense) just one. But this means there is one baptism that God now approves, expects, authorizes and commands. There is one that is operative. One does not allow for more than one. Regardless of how eloquently one might argue for more than one, he is still confronted with the plain, positive and easily understood statement that there is one baptism.

The Bible talks about the baptism of the Israelites in the cloud and sea, which referred to their crossing of the Red Sea. It mentions the baptism administered by John the Baptist as a part of his work as the forerunner of Christ, baptizing those who looked for the coming Savior. There was the baptism of Jesus personally at the hands of John. Another baptism applicable to Christ was His baptism of suffering, baptism being used in a figurative manner. Jesus taught the baptism of fire, which is the eternal punishment and yet to come upon the lost. He also promised His apostles the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which took place on Pentecost. He commanded the baptism of the Great Commission, which was water baptism, into Christ, for the remission of sins, by His authority, and to last until He comes again. These seven baptisms are all in Scripture.

At the time the apostle wrote, "*There is one baptism,*" the baptism that was being preached and practiced was water baptism, in the name of Christ, into Christ, for the remission of sins, into the body of Christ, and a burial. (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Mark 16:16; Galatians 3:27; First Corinthians 10:13; First Peter 3:31; Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:3,4).

The one baptism is the baptism administered by men, not the Lord, as was the case with the baptism of the Holy Spirit and will be the case with the baptism of fire.

We might spend just a moment on the contention that the one baptism is the baptism of the Holy Spirit because some claim to be baptized of the Holy Spirit now. They also contend for water baptism. That makes two baptisms, so something is amiss already with their doctrine.

Possibly a brief comparison between the baptisms will clarify somewhat. Holy Spirit baptism was never commanded, but promised. Water baptism of the Great Commission was commanded. Holy Spirit baptism was to be administered by Christ. Water baptism was to be administered by man. Holy

Spirit baptism is not essential for salvation. Water baptism is. We cannot escape the fact that only the apostles were promised the baptism of the Holy Spirit and they were the only ones to receive it. But the baptism that was to be preached to all included everybody for all needed to be saved.

Neither is there any room for sprinkling, pouring, or "triune" baptism in the New Testament. Baptism is immersion and all agree that baptism is immersion. Men have added substitutes to what God has authorized, but when you add these substitutes you add other baptisms. The Bible says there is one.

Like the other "ones" mentioned in the text, the statement that there is one baptism is not difficult to understand. It is just a matter of whether one believes the Bible or not.

One God

Finally, there is one God. This brings up the subject of idolatry. An idol is simply something or someone that is put before God. When God gave Israel the Ten Commandments, He said, "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*" (Exodus 20:3). Whenever Israel did turn to other gods they received God's wrath and punishment. Paul told the Thessalonian Christians "*how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.*" (First Thessalonians 1:9). Pagans have fashioned for themselves gods of every sort, even "*changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.*" (Romans 1:23). They "*served the creature more than the Creator.*" (Romans 1:25). Paul preached to the Athenians, "*God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things... Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.*" (Acts 17:24,25,29).

We might be inclined to think of idolatry only in terms of some image of paganism. Certainly this would be idolatry whether in the African jungle, an oriental temple, or a Catholic cathedral. But whatever is allowed to come between us and God becomes our idol. It might be our quest for pleasure, drive for power, prestige, wealth, etc. Even things that are good in themselves

and not evil can be allowed to take first place with us, such as our families, sports, businesses, vacations, etc. Many people will displace God in their lives, sometimes for a while and sometimes permanently, in order to lay hold on the paltry and temporary offerings of this world.

The one God means one Deity. Deity is composed of three persons, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. These three are one Deity. That there are three persons in the one Deity or Godhead (Godhood) in no way contradicts the teaching that there is one God. The term "God" in our text is probably reference to just God the Father inasmuch as the Lord (Son) and Holy Spirit had already been specified. But God often refers to all persons of Deity, the Godhead or Godhood. *"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three agree in one."* (First John 5:7). All three persons are addressed as Deity in the Bible and we recognize this truth.

Foundation for Unity

With these seven "ones" we have the basis for unity. It is a sin against God and man to promote division by teaching contrary to the doctrine of Christ (Romans 16:17). **Everything about His doctrine falls into one of these seven categories. Unity is not acheived through negotiation and compromise, but through surrender to the will of God. Peace with God is ours as we surrender to His will. Peace among men can be attained only as men surrender to the revelation of God. Of some matters, Paul stoutly affirms, "There is one..."**

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that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." (John 12:48). His words shall be the standard by which our lives shall be weighed and measured. *"Never man spake like this man."*

Therefore, we plead that each one hear the sweet voice of Jesus as He softly and tenderly calls us to Him. Hear Him as He says, *"Come unto me... I am the way."*

† † † † †

Never Man Spake Like This Man

The Bible includes the words of many great people. They are greater than most people because many were godly people, led by God, like God in their behavior. But there was One who spoke that was different from all the others. He had a different sound than what man had ever heard before Him. He stands out above all the rest. Jesus spoke as men had never spoken.

“And many of the people believed on him, and said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done? The Pharisees heard that the people murmured such things concerning him, and the Pharisees and chief priests sent officers to take him.” (John 7:31,32).

The people had mixed reactions toward Jesus. *“Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was? So there was a division among the people because of him. And some of them would have taken him, but no man laid hands on him.” (John 7:40-44).*

Officials sent officers to take Jesus, but they returned without Him. When asked, *“Why have ye not brought him?”* the only answer they gave was, *“Never man spake like this man.”* They had been overwhelmed with what they heard and how it had been delivered.

Different

What was it about the sayings of Jesus that made them so distinct from all others? Jesus was not outstanding because of His fashionable clothing, or riches, or political power. He did not attract people to Himself because of His physical appearance. Isaiah 53:2 said of Him in prophecy, *“He hath no form nor comeliness that we should desire him.”* His appeal was not through high education of this world or academic learning. So many today are impressed with various speakers because of the string of academic degrees they have attained. Do we not realize

that some of the world's biggest fools have such things because they deny God? So many of the problems of digression and apostasy that are attacking the church and the doctrine of Christ today are coming through the seminar^u trained, collegiate influences from within and within the church. We ought not be swayed by those who would have you believe their "superiority" because they have academic degrees. Many of us have them as well, but so what of that? As often as not, getting those degrees has so stained a person that he is not near as sound in the faith as those who have simply studied the Book.

Jesus did not get attention by being a good actor or pretender. But it was because He had something to say and because of the authoritative way that He said it. He spoke as the Son of God that He was on this earth.

No one had ever spoken with such authority as did Jesus. Men had spoken FOR God, with God guiding and inspiring their words. Their authority had been delegated to them. But none had spoken AS God for none could. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, *"It hath been said... but I say unto you..."* At the end of His sermon it is written that He taught as One having authority (Matthew 7:29).

The Messiah

When Jesus and the Samaritan woman had a conversation, we read, *"The woman saith unto him, I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ. When he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he."* (John 4:25,26). Again, *"Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world. He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."* (John 8:12). In verse 23, *"Ye are from beneath, I am from above; ye are of this world; I am not of this world."* Verse twenty-eight, *"When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself, but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things."*

After His ascension into heaven the apostles spoke in His name and by His authority. He had promised them the coming of the Holy Spirit who would guide them, teach them, bring all things to their remembrance (John 14:26). When Paul taught he said he taught the commandments of God (First Corinthians 14:37). The authority of the apostles was and is real because authority was delegated them from the true source of authority,

Jesus Christ. They were the ambassadors of Christ (Second Corinthians 5:20) and the "*earthen vessels*" (Second Corinthians 4:7). Their authority was derived from the Immanuel. "*For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.*" (Colossians 2:9).

His words produced divine results. There was power in His words. He could, by speaking, still the tempest, calm the elements, heal the sick, give sight to the blind, let the lame walk, the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak. Such evidence was presented to John the Baptist to reassure him that Jesus was the Lamb of God.

But there was also tenderness, love, compassion in the speaking of Jesus as He spoke men's sins forgiven, encouraged the weak, sympathized with the sorrowful. The power of His word is seen when He said, "*Lazarus, come forth,*" and Lazarus came forth from the grave alive again.

None before Him nor since could speak with such complete power and produce such results as did Jesus. Never man spake like this man.

Even though His words were divine and powerful, there was a simplicity about them. Some seem to think they are called upon to display their learning rather than achieve the learning of their hearers. Two listeners were attending a lecture and listened for a while, until one turned to the other and said, He sure must be smart. I cannot tell what he is talking about." Two others were listening and discussing the speech and the speaker and one asked, "What is he talking about?" The other responded, "He does not say."

It is said of the preaching of Christ that the poor had the gospel preached to them and the common people heard Him gladly (Mark 12:37). His words were such that Isaiah prophesied of His message, "*the wayfaring man, though fools, shall not err therein.*" (Isaiah 35:8).

Real Learning

Away with all of this parade of worldly learning by those who preach as if that matters. Bring more of the way and manner of Christ and Paul. Paul said, "*And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear, and in*

much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." (First Corinthians 2:1-5).

With authority, power and simplicity of His speaking, His words were made vibrant because they were firm, right to the point, precise, sometimes even stern. Some feel firmness and kindness cannot exist at the same time. But Jesus demonstrated both. Sternness may reveal greater compassion, even compassion sufficient to cause one to speak in ways he might not prefer, but which are necessary to accomplish the needed good of the hearer. Jesus spoke kindly, but firmly, even sternly.

How He Did It

We sight as examples for the reader's investigation, space prohibiting copying the long texts here, Matthew 21:13; 23:13;33; John 8:43-45. Jesus used words that were fierce and firm when the occasion demanded it. But they were to preserve and save, not to destroy anything but what was evil. We can see why those who heard Jesus came away saying, *"Never man spake like this man."*

But Jesus was different, not only because of His manner, authority, simplicity, firmness and kindness, but also because of the subject matter of which He spoke. He spoke of God as no other had spoken of Him. He claimed God as His Father. *"I and my Father are one."* (John 10:30). He claimed God sent Him and He was the Christ. *"I am one that beareth witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me."* (John 8:18). He taught of God as being perfect and the giver of good gifts. He taught God's providence and care and His nature. This was in order to permit man to know the Father, how God rewards and punishes, that God is a God of live and wrath, mercy and justice.

He taught about man as none other had taught. He taught the value of the soul being worth more than the whole world. He taught the proper relationship between husband and wife, parent and child, neighbor to neighbor, citizen to government, and even behavior toward enemies. He presented man's responsibility to God and the duty to obey God. He offered the solution to the problems that confront and confuse mankind. He came to teach and show the right way to live and how to be

prepared for death. *"Never man spake like this man."*

His most glorious message was the way of salvation from sin. He told of its cost. *"The Son of man must be lifted up."* (John 3:14). God gave His only begotten Son out of love to save man (John 3:16). Salvation can be ours upon obedience (Hebrews 5:9). *"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."* (Mark 16:16). *"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."* (Matthew 11:28). He taught the new birth (John 3:3-5). He brought hope to sinful and undeserving humanity. He offered forgiveness and heaven. He cited Himself as the way. *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me."* (John 14:6). *"Never man spake like this man."*

Far Reaching

He also taught about life beyond the grave. Centuries earlier Job had asked, *"If a man die, shall he live again?"* (Job 14:14). Christ answered, *"But whosoever drinketh of the water of life that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."* (John 4:14). *"I am the bread of life. He that cometh to me shall not hunger... I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man shall eat of this bread he shall live forever... I live because of the Father, so he that eateth me, he shall live because of me."* (John 6:51-57). *"Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also."* (John 14:1-3).

He not only taught life after death, but the resurrection of good and evil (John 5:28,29). He died but was raised and became the first fruits of them that slept (First Corinthians 15:23). Those that are His shall be raised to be with Him in heaven for ever and ever (First Thessalonians 4:13-18). For these and other reasons we can say as did those of long ago, *"Never man spake like this man."*

But there is one more reason we wish to mention why He was different from all others who had spoken or shall ever speak. We shall be judged by what He said. *"He that rejecteth me and receiveth not my words hath one that judgeth him; the word*

ARTICLE: IS LOVE A CAMOUFLAGE?

A great amount is said of "love" and the need for "love," but often the cry for "love" flows from people who seem to use "love" as a deceptive device for Satan. Some have a completely false and distorted concept regarding real love as taught in the Bible. They think it is simply a sentimental, smiling, pleasing and congenial association with others. Evidently, some think love means, "Do not ever cross me on anything I say or do because if you do it shows you do not love me." Others confuse love for people with love for whatever people do. They are not able to see how a person can hate sin and still love the sinner. But this is precisely what Jesus did (Romans 5:8). Bible love is seeking the other's highest good whatever might be the cost to oneself.

So often there are those who like to accuse others of a lack of love when the truth is the one they accuse possesses love like the Bible teaches. What the accusers generally think is that because one hates sin he must not have love for people. The accuser likes to say a brother does not have proper Christian love for others when he opposes error when what he really wants is to be accepted regardless of what he says, does, thinks, believes or practices.

Unfortunately, there are some openly pious preachers who like to exhort brethren to love one another (and this should be the case), but at the same time show an obvious disregard of love for the truth, the purity of the church, sound doctrine, and even brethren who are doing their best to manifest loyalty to the truth of Christ and encouraging those in error to repent. Sometimes people are accused of lacking love but the truth is they know the only way to show love for the lost is to show him the way to be saved and that he is lost until he obeys the will of God. Pleasing a sinner in his sin is not love. Paying no attention to sin is not love. Trying to be accepted by never condemning sin is lack of love. Such may win friends among the sinful, in and out of the church, but cannot make one acceptable before God. Providing a haven for those who rebel against truth is not a manifestation of real love. It is treason to the cause of Christ and treachery to the lost soul.

Such "love" is only a camouflage of a subtle device of Satan to persuade those in the Lord's church to ignore and tolerate sin and doctrinal error so the world will find us more appealing. We urge brethren to never allow such to be named among you.

James W. Boyd

ARTICLE: TACTICS OF LIBERALS

We know there are those who promote and defend liberalism. They are plenty in number. We know faithful brethren must stand for the truth against them. But we can better withstand them when we recognize the tactics they so commonly use. They betray themselves by the tactics they adopt. Their tactics seem to fit a pattern of behavior. Consider a few such tactics.

1. If you write them they will likely ignore you. Seldom do liberals answer letters which suggest their liberalism. If they answer at all, do not expect them to deal with the subject at hand because they will pass over it.
2. If you talk to them directly have witnesses because it is not uncommon for them to misquote you and misrepresent you to serve their own unholy purposes.
3. They object strenuously to anybody who objects to their liberalism. They seemingly reserve the right to object solely for themselves. All others are troublemakers with sinister motives.
4. They will ignore the evidence of liberalism even when presented to them or made available to them by an article, tape, or some other irrefutable evidence. They prefer to neither read nor hear the evidence in order to maintain an aloofness and not be required to take a stand one way or the other. They are constantly "studying the matter," but not really. They have already decided the liberal way and often do not wish it known.
5. When pressure mounts, they may begin to act, such as trying to bring pressure on faithful preachers or others who oppose and expose their liberalism. They complain to the elders of such preachers hoping the elders will be without backbone and clamp down the faithful preacher. They brand faithful churches as "anti" and try all kinds of intimidations.
6. They talk much of love, kindness, consideration and exhibit such characteristics less than any people on earth.
7. At all costs they avoid dealing with the principles involved but will soon resort to personal and judgmental remarks of a derogatory nature regarding the expressions, attitudes, manners, tones, etc. of those who resist their liberalism. Distraction from

the issues at hand is a favorite maneuver.

8. They will attempt to sidetrack any discussion or inquiry into unrelated and irrelevant matters in order to draw attention away from their liberalism that they promote and defend.

9. They will go to great lengths to find some fault somewhere in anything at all with those who oppose their liberalism, obviously thinking if they can find a wrinkle in faithful brethren this justifies their liberalism. If and when they find some fault in somebody, all that proves is that there is some fault in the one who recognizes their liberalism. They are still servants of the devil in promoting and defending liberalism.

10. After all else fails, rather than repent, which is the last thing on earth their pride would ever allow them to do, they will turn again to their original tactic to ignore the whole thing and keep right on going down the same path of liberalism they so adore.

Brethren who love the Lord, His Word and His church more than life itself are very well acquainted with these and other sinister tactics of deception so consistent with a liberal mind. You can be sure that those who behave, or misbehave, themselves in this fashion are only showing themselves for what they really are. They are liberals and should be noted as such.

Years ago, when Ahab met Elijah, he tried so hard to label Elijah as the troubler of Israel (First Kings 18:17). Elijah gave way to such a thing not for a moment. He rather said, *"I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house..."* Then he went on to tell Ahab how he had been the real trouble, *"...in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim."*

So it is with liberals who have their actions and words called into question. They act like the robber who blamed all his trouble with the law on the night watchman who caught him in the act of stealing. He never considers himself to be the troubler that he is to the cause of Christ. Beware, brethren, of such tactics of liberal people and those who would support them. Be strong and fight for the truth.

James W. Boyd



How Do We Hear?

We are warned in Scripture to take heed what we hear (Mark 4:24) and how we hear (Luke 8:18). We may not always be able to control everything that might fall on our ears, but much of it we can. And whatever we do hear we can take care how we hear, that is, what effect it might have on us. We can use self-control and self-discipline regarding our reactions to such things. But do we hear any better than the next fellow? What I am asking is whether we pay any attention to what we hear more than others even when we hear the gospel truth of Jesus Christ? Do we respond any more favorably before God than those who reject His Word altogether?

Yes, most would say they hear better when it comes to hearing God's Word. We often criticize those in religious error for just not paying real attention to the revealed truth. This criticism is justly given. But when I hear the commands to assemble faithfully being taught, and see brothers and sisters act as if such a command was never given, it does make one wonder how we hear.



JAMES W. BOYD

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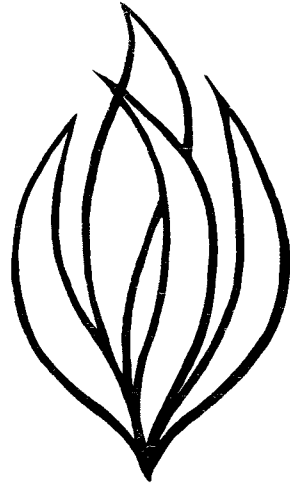
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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).



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Is the Young Man Safe?

We who are older should sense more keenly the responsibility that we have toward those who are younger whether we are parents or simply interested in their welfare. There are probably no verses in the Bible that should strike a parent with attention more than Ephesians 6:4 and Proverbs 22:6. *"And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."* *"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it."* Our lesson centers on one of the tragic questions of the Bible, asked by King David as he sat at a gate of a little place called Mahanaim which was but a short distance from Jerusalem. He was not there by choice but had been driven there as a result of a revolt against him led by his own son, Absalom. The question was, *"Is the young man Absalom safe?"* (Second Samuel 18:29).

About Questions

The Bible raises many questions and they are not all asked for the purpose of extracting information. The very first question of the Bible was asked by the devil. *"Hath God said ye shall not eat of any tree in the garden?"* (Genesis 3:1). This was not asked for information, but as a means of creating confusion and doubt in the mind of Eve. The devil knew that doubt was the first step toward disobedience.

Another question was asked by God of Cain, *"Where is thy brother, Abel?"* This was an embarrassing question to Cain, seeing how he had murdered his brother. God knew what had happened, but raised the question to impress upon Cain his responsibility and the enormity of his crime. Cain responded by asking a question, *"Am I my brother's keeper?"* He asked this in an effort to escape his guilt.

Job asked, *"If a man die shall he live again?"* Christ asked, *"What shall it profit a man if he should gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"* Neither of these questions sought information, but showed the inestimable value of the soul.

Some questions are asked in order to trick, deceive, entangle and ensnare. But David's question was asked for information. He wanted to know. *"Is the young man safe?"* It is somewhat

strange that this would be the question on his lips at that time, considering the manner of the character of Absalom and the events of the moment.

Absalom

Absalom was a very wicked person. He was murderer, having killed his half-brother, Amnon. Because Amnon had ravished Absalom's sister, Absalom took the law into his own hands and punished Amnon by death. Prior to killing Amnon he had nourished hatred and vengeance in his heart for two years. As a result of his crime he had to flee from Jerusalem for three more years before he tried to use Joab, David's captain, to make reconciliation for him.

When Joab refused to intercede on his behalf, Absalom resorted to blackmail and violence, threatening to destroy the crops of Joab unless he helped him.

When he returned to Jerusalem, he remained there for two years before being permitted into the courts of King David. During this time he was busy building hatred toward his father and plotted to overthrow him. He would sit at the gates of the city and when citizens would enter the city to have some matter settled by the king, Absalom would complain that they would not get justice and David was really unconcerned about them, and if only he could be in charge they would see better days. The Bible says he stole the hearts of the people away from David. This was no little accomplishment seeing how the people had adored David from the time he had slain Goliath.

Absalom finally asked leave to go from Jerusalem to Hebron on the premise he was going to keep a vow he had made. He was given a leave of absence. But it was not to keep a vow, but to muster his forces to revolt against David. He led the rebellion and did what no other enemy of David had been able to do, that is, drive David off his throne and from his capital city.

David's Flight

David leaving Jerusalem was a low point in David's life. He was fleeing for his life, his heart was broken, his own son was rebelling against him, his forces were in such disarray that he knew not what to expect from them, and some of his trusted advisors had sided with Absalom. He knew that it was in part his punishment for his own sins. But however philosophical David

viewed the situation, there can be no doubt but the character of Absalom was contemptible and reprehensible. He was a liar, a revolutionary, a murderer, a subverter and blackmailer.

But after this initial success by Absalom it soon became apparent that David's army had not forsaken him. David began operations to recover his throne. The armies of David and Absalom met on the field of battle. It was a case of son against father and father against son. What a tragic situation! The son had disgraced his father and would have gladly sacrificed his father to secure his own unholy ambitions. Yet, before the battle begins David instructs his men and all his captains, "*Deal gently with the young man for my sake.*" Absalom deserved severe treatment, but for David's sake, he pled that Absalom not be harshly treated.

The Conflict and Absalom

A great conflict followed and some twenty thousand fell in the forest of Ephraim. Absalom's army was routed, scattered and crushed by the more experienced, better trained, better led armies of David. David anxiously awaited word of the outcome as he sat at Mahanaim.

A messenger came toward him, then another. David asked the question, "*Is the young man Absalom safe?*" It is remarkable that this was what was most important to him. He did not ask the outcome of the battle, how many lives were lost, or whether the throne was recaptured. His concern was for his son, Absalom.

The answer he received told the story. "*Would that all the enemies of David were as Absalom.*" Absalom was dead, and his mangled body was buried beneath a pile of stones deep in the heart of the forest of Ephraim. No, Absalom was not safe. In reality, David's inquiry about the safety of his son had come much too late. He should have asked that long before now. It was too late to do anything for Absalom.

Too Late

David should have asked that question when he chose Absalom's mother to be his wife. She was the daughter of Talmi, the king of Geshur, a heathen land and of pagan people who cared nothing for the true and living God. David violated God's law by taking her for his wife. That marriage was not

motivated by love and respect for God or anyone else. It was purely for selfish and political interests, seeking alliances to enhance his own power. He took her, not asking what kind of mother she would be for his children, or what spiritual effect she would have on the lives of those around her. So many enter marriage without ever giving God and His will very much thought. No, Absalom was not safe even before he was born. He was not safe in the selection of his mother.

David should have asked, *"Is the young man safe?"* when he was looking with lustful eyes upon Bathsheba, when he was ruining the home of Uriah and conspiring to have Uriah killed in battle as if it were nothing. He should have been concerned when he was lying, trying to cover his sins by committing more sins. No child is safe when his father or mother is engaged in matters that are evil. How many parents today are putting stumblingblocks in the paths of their own children, pitfalls into which the young might fall, placing mines in their roadway to explode to their harm, and doing this by their own evil?

There is no evidence that David gave time, attention and interest in the training of Absalom, spiritually or otherwise. There was not the proper discipline when Absalom did evil. Spiritual training was obviously lacking, seeing the kind of person Absalom was. Parents harm their children immeasurably when they withhold proper discipline from them, when they are not attentive to the upbringing of their children, when they are too busy with other things, such as house, jobs, sports, fulfilling their own ambitions, etc. David was a busy man. He was guilty, however, of neglect relative to Absalom. Absalom was not the first son, nor the last, to have to suffer because his parents were not what they ought to have been, nor dealt with him as they should have done. The stones that covered the pit in the forest of Ephraim wherein did lay the body of Absalom was a monument to parental neglect of a child.

Self-rebuke and Regret

The question, *"Is the young man Absalom safe?"* is a heart-breaking question because there is so much self-rebuke in it. In Absalom's death David saw more than the death of his son. While he could know that Absalom had reaped as he had sown, he also knew that much of the blame was his own. Young people have responsibility, but so do those who are older. It is a terrible thing for a parent to realize that the suffering and

tragedy visited upon his own children are the results of his own sin, neglect and selfishness. David wailed, *"O my son, Absalom, my son, my son Absalom, would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son."*

The Worse Loss

David was experiencing the deepest grief one can know. He had a son to die before and he had already suffered that. But he knew that he could go to him even though he could not bring him back (Second Samuel 12). But now he was not only reliving the agony of the death of one of his children, but he knew he had helped to make it that way. Nothing now could be done. His question of concern had come too late.

We must wonder how many parents today should be raising the question regarding their own children while there is time for them to do something about their duty toward that child. Is your child safe? Is he safe if you do not give him the advantages of a Christian example? Is he safe if you are neglecting his spiritual training to live God's way? Is he safe if you are overly occupied with other matters that you neglect him? Is he safe with the friends and companions he has? Is he safe in the recreation he has, his education, where he goes and what he does?

Do It Now

If we do not discharge the duty of love now, while we have time and opportunity, we may be the one who someday will ask, "Is my child safe?" but we will be asking too late.

John Greenleaf Whittier wrote:

For of all sad words of tongue or pen,
The saddest of these, it might have been.

It might have been different with Absalom if it had first been different with David. What we who are older do makes a difference. We cannot lead where we will not go. God help us to show our love toward our young by living before God according to His Word.

† † † † †

How the Devil Keeps Man Unsaved

Beginning in the Garden of Eden there has always been a conflict between good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness, God against the devil and vice versa. God loves man, provides for him, teaches, warns and offers salvation. The devil wars against man seeking his destruction, using deception, doing all he can to persuade man to remain separated from God. Peter calls the devil our adversary (First Peter 5:8), which means enemy. Paul speaks of recovering those who have been taken captive by him at his will (Second Timothy 2:26).

Some do not believe in the existence of the devil, but the Bible leaves no doubt about his reality. It is grossly inconsistent to accept the reality of God and deny the reality of the devil. The same Bible teaches both.

The devil is called a tempter (Matthew 4) and this is because of the means used by the devil to ensnare the souls of all people. *"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."* (James 1:13-15). Through the avenues of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life (First John 2:15-17), the devil entices man to do that which is evil, thereby separating himself from God. Having caused man to sin through appealing through temptations, the devil tries to keep man from returning to God and being saved from the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). Our lesson draws attention to the ways the devil keeps man lost.

The Devil's Methods

Generally speaking, the devil is very effective at using half-truths which are nothing less than lies, indeed mechanisms of deception. Through false teaching, vain philosophies and false teachers the devil persuades man that sin is not real, but just an imaginative concept handed down from the ages of superstition. "You are not a sinner, and what if you are?" He

will often persuade a morally good man that he is not lost and therefore, there is no need to do anything about being saved. Certainly, if sin is unreal, or if one is not lost, the plea to be saved from sin seems something ridiculous. The devil has persuaded many very effectively this way to remain as they are.

But Paul teaches that sin is real and that all have sinned (Romans 3:9,10,23). We must keep in mind that the devil is the father of lies (John 8:44). The resolution as to whether sin is real and we are sinners when we transgress God's law is a simple matter. The Bible teaches that sin is real and all have sinned. If you do not believe this, then nothing else on the subject of salvation will have any real significance to you anyway. The Scriptures teach of the saved and the lost. Whether we accept that reality or not is not going to change the truth regarding it.

But the devil persuades, "Well, even if sin is real and you are a sinner, you are not the only one." This is true. All have sinned. We are not alone. But are we to conclude that we shall be saved just because others are lost? This is a time-worn appeal of Satan to get people to relax their concern simply because somebody else is in the same condition. Two wrongs never made a right, and one sin does not justify another. Because somebody else is in sin does not relieve you of your lost spiritual condition.

His Powerful Weapon

The devil constantly pleads with the lost to consider the hypocrite who is in the church. Sure enough, he can be found. Even Christ has His Judas. Hypocrisy has always been a favorite weapon of the devil to mislead and deceive the lost into thinking that it makes no difference about being in the Lord's church. While the saved are in the church, that is no guarantee that all who claim to be in the church will be saved. There is such a thing in Biblical warning as falling away and going back into sin. But the devil pleads, "You are just as good as some already in the church." That may be true to some extent. But what of that? That only means that both you and the hypocrite shall go to hell. Because somebody else fails in their duty does not dismiss your duty. Nobody is going to heaven on the sins of somebody else.

While the devil was pointing to the church and finding hypocrisy he could have pointed to the loyal, faithful, godly, sacrificial Christians who always put the Lord first in life. He

could have noted the pure, devoted, hard working servants of righteousness who are faithful in their tasks. But he does not cite these people. He wants everyone to compare themselves with the weak, immature, sinful, hypocritical church member because that way they may not look so bad.

Why not compare yourself with the best Christians you know? Better yet, why not compare yourself with the standard, who is Christ?

To those who are members of the church, let us be careful never to be one to whom the devil can point and use to discourage someone from being a Christian. To those who look at the faulty members of the church, none of whom have ever claimed perfection, but who are striving to live as close to God's will as they can, you are trying to hide behind such people, and anybody behind whom you can hide is closer to the Lord than you are and bigger than you are. Other sinful people are not an accepted excuse for you refusing to come to Christ to be saved.

Who Can Know?

"But how can you ever find out what is right? Look at all of the division in the religious world." The devil even calls attention to all the smart, scholarly, trained people who are bogged down in division and tells the common man that he is naive to think he can ever learn the truth.

Jesus knew that division would create unbelief (John 17:20,21). But while the devil through his servants tells you that you cannot know the truth the Lord tells us that we can. "*Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.*" (John 8:32). You do not have to know everything to know something, and know it for sure. God would not make it necessary for us to know the truth if we could not know it.

Most of the division in the religious world is over things not in the Bible anyway. People are divided over what men have added and subtracted from the faith of Christ, calling their inventions "Christian" just the same. This folly that we cannot know, but can only keep searching for truth, denies the Scriptures. Take the Bible, the Word of God, and search the Scriptures, and you can come to a knowledge of the truth. Denominationalism has done more to discourage honest Biblical study than most any other movement on earth. Once you teach people that nobody can know, and that it really does not make much difference what you believe anyway, little motive is left to

expend the effort necessary to learn what God's Word teaches.

But if you turn a deaf ear to the devil's pleas that you are all right as you are, that sin is unreal, that you are not lost, and that you cannot know the truth, he does not give up his efforts to keep you lost. "You can't afford to be a Christian. Look at what your friends might think. You would be condemning other people. You would have to change religions. You would be saying your dead relatives who followed other ways are lost."

Some people do care what others think, and we all should. But the problem with many is that they care what others think more than they care what God thinks. Some who believed on Jesus would not confess Him because they loved the praises of men more than the praises of God (Matthew 12:42,43). One must even put family in a secondary position when it comes to serving God (Luke 14:26,27,33). There are costs to being a Christian (Luke 9:23,24) and some are unwilling to pay them. But we should be more concerned with what God thinks than what anybody else might think.

A Necessary Change

Yes, if you are not a Christian, to become a Christian, if you are already religious, you must change your religion. If you are in a denomination, you must leave that and become a Christian. If you are in the Jewish faith, or Islam, or the many other religions, to be a Christian you must change your religion. But you are not condemning others in so doing. You are not given the power to save or condemn anybody, living or dead. If one is condemned it is because he or she rejected Christ and did not come to Him. In coming to Christ you are doing what you must do to be saved; not condemning anybody.

Whatever you do is not going to affect the eternal destiny of your dead relatives anyway. If you think they were honest and sincere and acted on their convictions, and you have learned what they never learned, how can you honor them by being anything less than honest and sincere and acting upon the truth that you have learned? Most of the examples of conversion, if not all, that we find in the New Testament are of religious people. They were taught to change religions. Why should that be so unexpected? If changing religions is discrediting to foreparents, then why did the Lord teach people to change religions? Instead of thinking you cannot afford to come to Christ, you do better to think if you can afford to refuse Him and

die without hope.

Other Persuasions

But then the devil might persuade, "All right. Be a Christian. But you can't hold out. So many have fallen by the wayside. You will too. The standards are too high and you are too weak."

True, others have fallen, the standards are high, we all are weak. But we need not fall if we follow the Lord's lead. *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it."* (First Corinthians 10:13). *"Wherefore he is able to save them to them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."* (Hebrews 7:25). When we sin we have an Advocate on our behalf (First John 2:1). God has given us directions whereby we need not fail. Satan tells you that you cannot hold out faithful, but the Lord tells you that you can. Who do you believe?

But if the devil sees you will not be swayed by these tricks and lies, he may appear to give in somewhat by saying, "All right. Be a Christian, but just do not become one right now. Later, maybe, but give it more time." Satan is smart enough to know that postponing what ought to be done is one of the most effective ways of never getting something done. Every moment one remains out of Christ gives opportunity for teaching, influence and circumstances that might dissuade one who is almost persuaded to be a Christian to turn from it and never come as close to the Lord again. He knows that, and you need to be aware of this deception also.

"Wait until you get older. Wait until the teen years have passed. Wait until you are married. Wait until your mate comes with you. Wait until you are more settled. Wait for this and wait for that." Just so long as you are willing to wait the devil is pleased because he has persuaded you to remain lost. In time, by continued postponement, he will find ways and means to drive all desire for being a Christian from your heart.

What Then?

How will it be with you as you stand before God in judgment

trying to explain how you rejected His only begotten Son on the basis that you intended to obey Him someday, but just waited?

These are but a few of the ways the devil persuades people to remain in condemnation. Has he been successful with you so far with such as these approaches, or some other? When life is over, will it really matter very much what plea the devil used to keep you lost? You will be just as lost regardless of the plea you heeded. Can't you understand that?

Put the devil to flight like Jesus did. Take the Word of God and use it. When the devil raises some temptation to remain lost, says to him, "*It is written...*" and then do as the Scripture demands. Remember, "*Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.*" (Hebrews 3:15). Now is the accepted time.

† † † † †

The Day You Die

What is your life? There have been many attempts to define life. Some picture it as a battle to be fought, a race to be run, or as a ship on the high seas that leaves one port (birth) and sails to another (death). Shakespear likened life to an act on the stage and we are all actors until the final curtain falls. Others have called it a leaf of paper on which we write until there is no more space. It has been called a game to play with each one in his position until the final whistle blows ending the game. Life has been simply defined as that span of time between birth and death. Whatever way one may choose to describe or define it, it must end. Life is never finished. It just stops.

Hebrews 9:27 tells us, "*And as it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment.*" Solomon said there is a time for many things including "*a time to die.*" (Ecclesiastes 3:2). James said life was a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes (James 4:4). The only way to escape death as has been experienced by all those who have gone before us is to be living when the Lord returns, and even then we shall be changed (First Corinthians 15:51-53). All of us will cease to be as we are now.

When?

When will the day of your death come? You may know the date of death of some loved one or prominent person. But when will the date of your death be settled? *"Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."* (Proverbs 27:1). It may be sometime today. Obviously, we do not know. Even if we remain until the coming of the Lord we cannot know because that day is not revealed unto us (Matthew 24:42). But it will come eventually. The Scriptures emphasize the brevity and uncertainty of life and the certainty of death (James 4:13-16). Have you ever seen the instability of the vapors that rise from the spout of a tea kettle? Is it secure and stable? Is it not void of permanence? So is life. When will the day of your death be? Will it be soon? Is it distant?

Kind of Day

Have you ever wondered what kind of day it might be, the day you die? Will it be one of sunshine, rain, wind or storms? What season will it be? Will it be Summer, Winter, Spring or Fall? It will be one of these. We have been at the graveside when it was raining, snowing, bitter cold, intensely hot, when the sun was hidden behind clouds, when it was soft and warm. Will your death possibly be at night, near the stroke of twelve, or early in the morning, or even during "rush hours?" Who can tell? How many of us would really want to know anyway? Though these things we cannot know, we know it will be sometime, do we not?

Where?

Where will you be when death inevitably overtakes you? You may be at home, on a visit, attending to business, at some special event. It may be beside the machine you operate for a livelihood, or behind your office desk. Possibly it will be in a hospital, in your own bed or chair, your own backyard or even beside the road.

Doing What?

What will you have been doing just prior to your death? Will you be alone, with friends, with family, or among strangers? Will

you have left everyone the way you would want to have left them, with kind words, a smile, possibly even a prayer? Or would you have left them with a scold, a fight, a sneer, a cross word and in animosity? Just how will it be when you go out into the next world? How will you be remembered by those who remain? That day is bound to come.

How?

We know not when, where, nor how we shall die. It is keenly impressed on my mind a family friend who died slowly, agonizing in pain after a long illness of suffering, each day wondering, and almost hoping, that life would be terminated. I recall my mother telling me how my father died. He arose from his bed early one morning, went to the window to pull down the shade to prevent the sun from shining into his face, returning to the bed, and in a moment breathing his last breath. There was no warning.

I once read of a lad, only twelve years old, who was called to supper by his mother. He had been playing across the street in his friend's yard. Before the eyes of his friend and mother he was struck down by a passing automobile. This is not an unusual thing. The first funeral I preached in South Bend, Indiana was of a man who had gone to deliver some paint and was killed in an automobile accident instantly. Another dear sister, just a hour before she was to babysit with our children, was wrapping Christmas presents, ran out of ribbon, dashed across the street for some more, but never got back because she was overrun by a car. Death comes in many ways.

A sobering story I read was of a soldier that had returned to this country after being in battle. He telephoned his folks that he was safe and coming home. He replaced the receiver, went out of the booth, a runaway truck knocked down some live electrical wires and he was electrocuted. You can recall many experiences of your own and many situations. The stories could go on and on because each death is a story worth telling. But the point is that death came and that day was the day of death for that person. Death is no respecter of age, wealth, health, geography or anything else. The point is that regardless of when, where or how, death will come to me and to you.

Face the Reality

Am I trying to be morbid or create fear in you? I certainly am not trying to be morbid. Create fear? Possibly, to some extent. Enough to arouse you to serious thought. But the primary motive is to help us all be realistic and face the fact there is an eternity awaiting us. The Lord used fear to awaken and arouse us, and possibly it is good that we fear some things. It is not easy to face these matters. We do not wish to dwell on morbid things. But it is senseless and foolish not to give them some consideration. We live so much of life in imagination and make believe that we run from unpleasant realities. But they do not go away just because we push them from the mind.

Does it surprise you for me to tell you that when, where or how you die is not the most important matter about death? Yes, we are concerned about such things. We concern ourselves with so many matters. For instance, what did you do today? What occupied your time? Time is the substance from which life is made. If you could know that today would be your last, would you have lived it differently? Did you fret over what to serve at the next meal? Was mowing the lawn really that important? Would you have fixed your car? Or whatever you did, did it really matter if you could have known this was your last day? Surely, there are some things we would have done differently if we had known, but we could not have known and therefore we did what we felt was demanding of us. This is an essential part of living and these seemingly trivial matters, although relatively insignificant, do matter to some extent. But on the day of one's death, are they the most important thing?

Only when we consider the day of our death can we focus proper attention of what really counts. So many of us are missing the mark in the things that matter. Read Luke 12:16-21 and 16:19-31. Here were people who lived, like you are living now, who missed what is important. *"What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"* (Mark 8:36). This helps us to consider the important things.

Things That Matter

May I suggest to you some things that matter, even on the day you die? How did you treat your family? Did you love your wife or husband as you should? What of your children? Did you treat them with respect, kindness, concern, seeking their highest good? It will matter on the day you die.

How did you use your influence? You have influence

(Romans 14:7) and you shall give an account of it. This is why Paul urged us to abstain from the appearance of evil. Was your life's influence on the side of good or evil? That will matter on the day you die.

What example did you manifest day in and day out? Was God glorified or could He be ashamed of you (Matthew 5:16). How did you speak to other people (James 3:3-12). Did you control your tongue? *"For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."* (Matthew 12:37).

Whether or not you showed love for others, especially your brethren, will make a great difference on the day you die. The two great commandments are named by Jesus as loving God and loving your neighbor (Matthew 22:35-40). Will your life have been wasted or wisely spent? What heritage do you leave for others? Will you face God empty-handed? Will you be likened unto the prodigal son in the swine pit, or as one who returned home? Are you to be like Judas who destroyed himself? "Oh the years of sinning wasted, would I could recall them now."

How did you meet your responsibilities in life? We are not responsible for many things of our lives because they were out of our control. But there are so many, many things for which we are responsible. What I make of myself, do with my talents, how I live, what standards I used to measure, what I am before God and man, for these things I am personally responsible. Robert E. Lee once said, "Duty is the sublimest word in the English language." Whether he was right or not, duty is important. How you did your duty will be important on the day you die. The sense of duty has caused many people to even face death rather than turn their back on duty.

Did you "brighten the corner where you are?" Not many of us shall ever have an impact that affects the whole world. We can do something about the corner where we live. Will anybody else be in heaven because of you, or will somebody else be in hell because of you? This will matter on the day you die. The reason they matter is because, *"We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that everyone may receive the things done in the body according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."* (Second Corinthians 5:10).

Solomon wrote, *"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man."* (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Relationship to God

What matters most is our relationship to God. To be among those who shall enjoy heaven we must live "*in Christ*" and die "*in the Lord*." Salvation is "*in Christ*." (Second Timothy 2:10). There is no condemnation "*in Christ*" (Romans 8:1). The blessed are those who die "*in the Lord*." (Revelation 14:13). All spiritual blessings are "*in Christ*." (Ephesians 1:3). When the final hour of my life, and your life, shall have ticked away, all that matters is: **Have I been a true and faithful child of God in Christ?** All that matters is whether we have fought a good fight, kept the faith, finished the course, as Paul said in Second Timothy 4:6-8. After we breathe our last, no treasure of earth is of any value to us, but only those treasures laid up in heaven (Matthew 6:19,20). The song reads, "Earth holds no treasures, but perish with using, however precious they be. Yet, there's a country to which I am going. Heaven hold all to me."

These thoughts are not sensational, but true and realistic. This paragraph may be the last you shall ever read, or that I shall ever write. Someday it will be that way. We must be impressed that how we stand before God is the itmost urgency of life.

When your span on earth is o'er,
What awaits on yonder shore?
Ask not where, nor when the day
Nor the how you end your stay.
But fear the Lord, and His way keep
And death will be but blissful sleep.
You'll start your flight to world's on high,
On the day that you must die. JWB

† † † † †

It Depends How You Count It

The calendar shows that February has fewer days than any of the other months. We do not doubt that is true by actual sunrises and sunsets. But why does it seem this cold, cold month drags on and on. It makes Spring look so good.

Encouraging Words From Haggai

Judah had returned from seventy years of Babylonian captivity. This return was like the rebirth of the nation, a deliverance from Egypt, a new and fresh start for Israel. They were given divine instructions to establish again national life and religion. Through that nation God would reveal Himself and Jesus the Christ would come.

The prophets Isalah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel and others had kept before the people that the exile would not be the end of this special nation through which God planned to fulfill His promises to Abraham. Even though they had violated God's law and suffered the resulting losses, this did not nullify the yet unfulfilled promises of the seed through which all the families of the earth would be blessed. The nation would return to the homeland, and this they did.

There were three great restoration leaders in the return of the Jews from captivity. As there had been three major migrations from Judah into Babylon, so there were three great migrations from Babylon back to Judah. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah, each in his own time, there was the rebuilding of the temple, the great religious revival, and the restructure of the walls of Jerusalem. The prophecy and work of Haggai came in the context of the return and effort led by Zerubbabel and the rebuilding of the temple.

Rebuilding the Temple

When the Jews reached Palestine they enthusiastically began the work on the temple. They laid the foundations and set up some altars. But the work stopped. This was due to outside opposition from adversaries, but also due to the indifference on the part of the Jews themselves. The enthusiasm of the beginning waned away. This inactivity extended for some fifteen years. The nation was not prospering as had been expected. The religious activity had not been restored. It was into this stale and stalled situation that Haggai, God's prophet comes.

Haggai was a man of unconquerable faith and an iron resolution with a burning zeal for the restoration of the temple.

He had the ability to arouse people to action. He is more noted for his sternness than his softness, but his sternness was motivated by an unquenchable love for God, God's people, God's ways and God's temple.

The prophets of the Old Testament were both proclaimers and predictors. Their work was that of foretelling and forthtelling. Haggai was a prophet more in the category of a preacher than one who foretold the future, although there were future elements in many of his words. He spent his words denouncing sin, warning of judgment, instructing in the law, and encouraging his brethren to duty and action. He met great difficulties in his work, but his task was crucial to the future of the nation. In the two chapters of Haggai we have four discourses that he gave to the people.

Rebuke

The first of Haggai's words were words of rebuke. The people were living in error and inconsistency and this had to be called to their attention. *"Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built."* (Haggai 1:2). In other words, many were saying that the rebuilding of the temple was a good work and ought to be done, but "not right now." The time was not right, according to them. They needed to wait for better times. It seems that the history of those who profess to serve God is often blemished with those who say they agree with some work but who always find a way to defeat it by saying, "We better wait until a better time." This has been true in many efforts undertaken for growth and building. It has postponed many mission efforts and other works of the church. It has choked off much benevolent work. "Don't do it now. Let's wait and see what happens and how things might go."

Surely, there is to be intelligent consideration before any work is undertaken. But with some folks there never is the right time to get on with it. This was the problem among the people of Judah regarding the temple rebuilding.

But they were so inconsistent in their actions that they proved themselves faithless and selfish. *"Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?"* (Haggai 1:4). The people must have thought the time was ripe for building their own houses and doing what they wanted to do for themselves. But building the temple of God ought be

postponed. It did not make sense. Some say today that we lack money, ability, training knowledge, etc. to do what needs to be done. But they readily assume other activities that take the same or similar demands if it is what benefits them personally. It is strange how some leaders have wailed that it is a bad time to borrow money to build or restore a house of assembly, but borrow money for their own businesses and homes. Some say we cannot afford to assume responsibility for support in some mission field, but find no difficulty to buy on credit whatever they wish to get for themselves.

It was true that the nation of Judah was not getting anywhere. *"Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; he drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put into a bag with holes."* (Haggai 1:6). The people were busy scurrying here, there and everywhere doing what they wanted to do, but had failed to put first things first. Haggai exposed to them their sin. We must add here that when these people faced their neglect and transgression they soon got busy with the work on the temple.

Discouragement

But they faced another problem from those who hindered the work by being a source of discouragement. Judah had been in exile for seventy years. There were some who had gone into exile and had now returned who could recall the former temple before it was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. They were much older but they remembered. As the new temple began to rise from its foundations again, some standing by were heard to say, in essence, "It's nice, but it does not compare with the one I remember." "It's not like the earlier one." "Your work is inferior to what was done before." Haggai said, *"Who is left among you that saw this house in her glory? and how do you see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?"* (Haggai 2:3). These words that belittled the work were discouraging to those who labored.

There is no indication that the critics were helping to improve matters at all, but only stood by and criticized. They seemed to have forgotten that the first temple had been destroyed because they, and others of their generation, had brought calamity upon the nation by their sins. If they had been busier encouraging the efforts rather than mocking them the work could have

progressed faster. We once heard a brother respond to some critics of him and what he was doing, something they all agreed needed to be done but some did not like the way he was doing it. He said, "I like the way I am doing it better than the way you are not doing it."

The critics of the new temple, however, were wrong in their evaluation of the work. *"The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts, and in this place I will give peace, saith the Lord of hosts."* (Haggai 2:9). So the work continued in spite of this hindrance. Some have thought possibly Haggai used these words with reference to the spiritual temple, the church, that was to come.

Revival

We mentioned that things were not going well in Judah as they should have been because of the neglect to attend to first things first. But with the teaching of Haggai and his encouragements to get on with the work there was renewed effort. The people started in the right direction again. But they became impatient and began to cry, "Where are the blessings we are supposed to receive?" They had started to work again, and they wanted rewards immediately. This specific complaint is not made in the text of Haggai, but this attitude is implied in chapter two, verses eighteen and nineteen. *"Consider now from this day and upward, from the four and twentieth day of the ninth month, even from the day that the foundation of the Lord's temple was laid, consider it. Is the seed yet in the barn? Yea, as yet the vine, and the fig tree, and the pomgranate and the olive tree, hath not brought forth, from this day I will bless you."*

Haggai was trying to show his brethren that their reward was not to come when they began the task, but when they completed it. They had started again in the right direction, but they had not accomplished the goal. The harvest was not yet in storage. The trees had not yet produced their fruit. For fifteen years they had sown the seeds of indifference, selfishness, inactivity, drifting along the wrong direction, putting emphasis on the wrong things, following the wrong advice, tolerating sin, and they had no right to expect an overnight change in conditions just because they had rounded the corner and started the right way. No man has a right to expect the field to be completely plowed just because he has started his tractor. No man has a right to expect an immediate harvest just because he

has sown his seed. People get things into a bad way over a period of years and then wake up to see their folly and make a turn around and sometimes get impatient and expect things to clear up overnight. Haggai was telling his people that things do not work that way. They were to be commended to have started but they were supposed to finish the work, not just start it again, in order to be blessed.

It is no different in principle today. Faithfulness and patience, steadfastness and continuation is what brings results. People can start a plan of action, but the test comes in completing it.

Encouragement

Finally, Haggai does speak about the future and gives them an encouraging word. He told them that God would protect them from their enemies and their heathen adversaries would be overthrown. *"Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, I will shake the heavens and the earth, and I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen, and I will overthrow the chariots, and those that ride in them; and the horses and their riders shall come down, every one by the sword of his brother."* (Haggai 2:21,22). These people would be established again. Their purposes for having been chosen of God would be accomplished because, *"I have chosen thee, saith the Lord of hosts."* (Haggai 2:23).

Today we have encouraging words from God just as Judah received them through Haggai. If we will refuse to give heed to the words of faithless men who always plead for postponement of everything and waiting on every action; if we will neither be among nor listen to those who only criticize and belittle every effort we put forth; if we will not grow impatient for rewards before we put for the needed labor; if we will put first thing first in our lives and establish righteous priorities, God shall bless us as He did Judah. Our enemies shall be overcome as were theirs. Our promises are not that we shall overcome physical enemies, but the spiritual destroyed of the soul. Eternal happiness and spiritual protection shall be ours. As we labor in the building of the Lord's house, the church, we have God's assurances with us as did the people of Judah when they were erecting the physical temple in Jerusalem. Let us avoid their mistakes and be encouraged in Haggai's instructions.

The Three Crosses

"And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand and the other on the left." (Luke 23:33).

At Forrest Lawn Cemetery there was a painting of the crucifixion scene that was very realistic. You could sit and look at it and almost imagine being present outside of Jerusalem at that event. The hill of Calvary, also called Golgatha, is called *"The place of the skull."* (Matthew 15:22). Some have surmised that this identification was given because this was the place of crucifixion. Others have thought it was because the hill appears from a distance like a crown of a human skull. However about that, it was at this place that God's Son was crucified alongside two transgressors. *"And with him they crucify two thieves, the one on his right hand, and the other on his left. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And he was numbered with the transgressors."* (Matthew 15:27,28).

Cross of Rebellion

While we usually fix our attention on just one cross, in this lesson let us consider all three crosses. Each had a certain significance about it. On the one side was the cross of one of the thieves. This man was dying IN sin. His was, to the last, a cross of rebellion. Even as he died he scoffed at Jesus. *"And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us."* (Luke 23:39). More tragic than the physical anguish he suffered was his hatred and contempt cast toward the One on the center cross. We wonder why? What had Jesus ever done to him or anyone else that would arouse such feelings within this man? Without reason, except his own hopelessness and frustrations, he showers Jesus with enmity and scorn. But do not many do so today?

This thief typifies the illogical, unreasonable, nonsensical unbelief and hatred that many in the world have toward the Christ. In spite of His perfect life and all the good He did, the hope He offers, the love He manifests, many hate Christ. The reason they hate Him is because Christ condemned sin and they love their sins. *"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light,*

because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be repoved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." (John 3:19-21).

Consider the statement of the thief again. "IF [emphasis, JWB] thou be Christ..." Has there ever been any real doubt about it? Has not there been abundant and manifold evidence proving that truth? There is no "if" about the identity of the Christ. But in these words we see the doubt and skepticism of unbelief, and an attempt to deny the claim of the Christ even as they were hanging on crosses.

He challenges Christ, "Save thyself and us." His attitude is, "Even thought I disbelieve and scorn you, do something good for me." What impudence! Why call upon Jesus for favor while railing against Him at the same time? How like many today who encounter hardships in life, who care nothing for God, but lash out against God because of their adversity and blame God! They act as if God owed them everything and they owed God nothing. They are all TAKE and no GIVE.

How many souls have perished on this cross of rebellion from that day until this? How many still lose all, having the same attitudes toward Jesus as this one IN sin, dying on the cross of rebellion?

Cross of Repentance

Consider now the other thief on the other cross. How different he was from the first one. One was dying IN sin, but this second thief was dying TO sin, separating himself from his sin. One was dying on a cross of rebellion but the other was dying on a cross of repentance.

At first it appears he may have joined the railing against Christ and he also wanted deliverance. But when he spoke, he did so, not to scoff, but to worship and plead.

He first directed his words to the other thief. "But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds. But this man hath done nothing amiss." (Luke 23:40,41). There is unmistakable respect and reverence in his heart as he is before God. While he admits his sinfulness, he recognizes the innocence of Jesus. Few statements are as comprehensive concerning the life of Jesus as

this one by the thief. *"He hath done nothing amiss."* Jesus lived a perfect life and never sinned. This is one of the evidences of His Deity and the truthfulness of his claim.

Then he turned to speak to Christ and said, *"Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily, I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."* (Luke 23:42,43). His was a humble petition to one he considered as the Lord. He looked upon Jesus as one who would have His kingdom. The situation implies that he knew the kingdom of Christ was spiritual rather than earthly because Jesus was also on the cross. An earthly kingdom from Him was not likely under these conditions. Only a spiritual kingdom was in his thoughts. Jesus knew that for which he was asking, and granted unto him spiritual benefits. He answered in the way to satisfy his plea. This thief's approach and attitude of heart was such that Jesus responded, *"Today thou shalt be with me in paradise."*

What a difference in the thieves! One saw Jesus as a dying imposter. The other saw Him as Lord. One considered Him a pretender. The other saw Him as a King. One saw Jesus as a sinner dying for his deeds. The other saw Him as one dying for the sins of others. One was dying IN sin. The other was dying TO sin. One was on a cross of rebellion. The other was on a cross of repentance.

Cross of Redemption

We now focus attention on the third and middle cross on which the Son of God was hanging. His was a cross of redemption where He was dying FOR sin. *"Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."* (Hebrews 9:12). *"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spott."* (First Peter 1:18,19). *"Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."* (Titus 2:14). *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."* (Ephesians 1:7). *"For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the*

likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.” (Romans 8:3). *“For even Christ pleased not himself, but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.”* (Romans 15:3). *“That he by the grace of God should taste of death for every man.”* (Hebrews 2:9). *“And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.”* (First John 2:2). *“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”* (First Corinthians 5:21).

It Was For Me

The death of Christ on the cross was a vicarious death, the just dying for the unjust, one instead of the other. He was not merely a martyr for His cause, but *“the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.”* (John 1:29). He is our Passover (First Corinthians 5:7). *“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness, by whose stripes ye were healed.”* (First Peter 2:24).

The thieves died because of their own sins. Christ died for my sins and yours, and those of all mankind. God could deal with us and our sinfulness either through justice or mercy. If he dealt with us in justice without mercy we would have to suffer for our sins. If He dealt with us in mercy without justice, how could God be called just? Justice does not allow good and evil to be treated alike. But God did deal with us in justice and mercy because justice and mercy met at the cross of Christ. *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God, to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness, that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.”* (Romans 3:23-26). Justice was met by the penalty being paid by Christ. Mercy was extended by the merit of His blood to sinful mankind, and man was given the opportunity to be free from the wages of sin.

Let us magnify the glorious Christ who was the only perfect One. Only He could die for the sins of others because He was without spot or blemish. Any other would at best die for his own sins, and none can even do that, because the death of no man is

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(from inside cover)

adequate penalty for sin against God. The Father appointed His Son, Jesus Christ, as the one way of salvation and there is no other (Acts 4:12; John 14:6).

We point you to these three crosses on Golgatha. One cross is of rebellion, another of repentance, the third of redemption. As we look at the middle cross, we can sing, "I must needs go home by the way of the cross; there's no other way but this." Again, "There was one who was willing to die in my stead, that a soul so unworthy might live." Of our sins we can sing, "They are nailed to the cross." Jesus went to the cross, and "He carried my sins with Him there."

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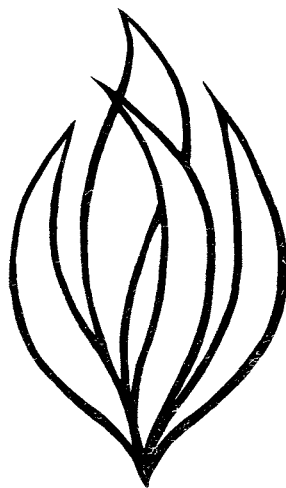
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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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A Mighty Fortress

The text of our study is Psalm forty-six and these eleven verses should be read before continuing. The reading of it will be a blessing because it is a psalm of assurance, confidence, praise of God, comfort to the believer and an encouragement.

It is generally thought that David wrote most of the Psalms, but the exact authorship of many of them cannot be specified dogmatically. As for Psalm forty-six, there were many instances in the life of David that were characteristic of the sentiments of this psalm, so we rather believe that the Holy Spirit used David to write it. Just what particular occasion may have motivated it we cannot be sure.

There is a song composed by Martin Luther entitled, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." It is sometimes called the battle hymn of the Reformation. It expressed patriotic fervor and has the quality that stirs confidence, hope and the daring in the heart of the believer to fight the good fight. It is said that Luther caught in this hymn the meaning and message of Psalm forty-six. As First Corinthians thirteen is called the "love chapter," and Hebrews eleven called the "hall of faith," this Psalm is a "psalm of faith."

From verse one we conclude that it is good to have faith in God, who is presented to us in three ways. He is our refuge; a place to hide and be covered in safety from the storms and dangers. He is our strength; a guarantee of stability, steadfastness and power. He is our help; the source of assistance and the One who lifts up, heartens and saves in the time of need.

Tumult Versus Serenity

In verses two and three the writer presents a contrast between the tumultuous world in general and the thoughtful serenity of faithfulness to God. The earth may be moved, the mountains carried into the seas, the waters may roar, the mountains shake and tremble, and everything that man has considered firm and secure, lasting and stable, is subjected to collapse and commotion. But what of that? God is our refuge and strength and help. Therefore, *"will not we fear."*

One has commented on this passage by writing, "At this moment... we have the tumult of war, the unrest and anxiety of statesmen and nations as to the balance of power. In politics at home there is the strife and contention of parties. In the commercial world there are countless anxieties and fierce competitions. Even the religious world is not free from the noise of controversy and the din of party strife. In every realm of life there is unrest and tumult to a greater or lesser extent. All things are in commotion."

This sounds like the writer was describing our present day, but he was not. This was written back in 1892 before most of us were born. We do not wish to minimize the turmoil of our times, but only call to our attention that such has always been the case in our world in varying degrees. Little wonder this world has been described as a vale of tears. Job said (Job 14:1), "*Man that is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble.*" But God has seen His people through trouble in the past, does now and will again. This is the assurance of Psalm forty-six.

Why Our State?

Why is our world in such a state of frustration? It is because mankind is unable to live as we should without God. The turbulence of the world is made so directly or indirectly because of sin, lust, uncontrolled passion, greed, hate, unchecked ambition, selfishness, etc. Because of sin there is never to be found in this world the complete peace that cannot be interrupted. Nothing in this life is stable and secure.

There is a realm, however, where strife and commotion is unknown and cannot dwell. But it is not in this life. We only get glimpses, fleeting tastes, of that realm now and then while here on this earth.

But even so, in the midst of all the worldly havocs, "*will not we fear.*" Why is it that even in the midst of earthquake, invasion, disaster, desperate situations that the believer is not overwhelmed? Why is there no foe too strong, no danger too much, for the one who holds firmly to the hand of God? Why can the believer look with such confidence upon God as his refuge, strength and help? The psalmist answers with four reasons that we wish to observe.

Calm Amidst Confusion

One, from verse four, instead of the fear-instilling confusion of this world, there is the supply of refreshing life-giving waters that provide grace, comfort and nourishment. The city of God is a symbolism for the place of habitation of God's people which corresponds to the Lord's church today. In that city is given a free-flowing stream of mercies that bring rich blessings to the citizens of God's city, the place of supply and blessing.

Two, from verse five, security is assured because of God's presence. "*God is in the midst of her.*" His presence was the security of ancient physical Israel. His presence is no less with His people now. His presence makes His city unlike the threatening world that quakes and roars. His presence means stability. "*She shall not be moved.*" Here is that which is dependable and will last. Here is something upon which we can look and can count on it, for it is without end. As the song says, "When all around my soul gives way, He still is all my hope and stay." God is the Rock of refuge; the Haven of rest; providing for us the anchor of the soul.

Three, "*God shall help and that right early.*" Our undaunted state of mind is attributable to this guarantee. God, in His time, at the proper season, with utmost speed, will assist us in time of trouble.

We all love the parable of the Good Samaritan because that man acted in the likeness of God. Trouble befell the traveller and the Samaritan gave the needed assistance. Not only was his help immediate, but was also promised for the future, even in the surrounding of the gravest peril. At no time is help so welcome as in the time when we are beset with problems and troubles. The Psalmist tells us that God is ever present with us to see us through each trial.

So It Can Remain

Four, from verse six, we can remain serene in this life because the power of God is greater than that of our enemy. The heathens rage, kingdoms are shaken, but the enemy shall melt beneath the utterances from the voice of God. Sometimes it seems the wicked have their own way and we have temporarily fallen before our enemies. But that is not forever. Why should we fear? When our enemies are at His command and the Lord of hosts is with us, our ultimate victory is secured.

In verse seven God is identified as the God of Jacob, which means He is also the God of Abraham and Isaac, the God who

created all things by the power of His Word. It is that same God, Jehovah of heaven, who has promised and who is our refuge. There is no other like power and might as our God.

Beginning at verse eight, the psalmist turns our attention to two worthy considerations which add to our security and confidence. One is the works of God and the other is the glory of God. He mentions two works in particular. One is the *"desolation he hath made in the earth."* This desolation is against the enemies of the righteous. By such desolation the Lord is saying, "Do you not see how vain it is to fight against Jehovah? Is it not clear that all your noise, rush, fury, roar and fear and boasting is but empty prattle? Can you not realize how senseless is the struggle against the eternal and omnipotent God?" His work of judgment, condemnation of evil and the destruction of wickedness gives hope, assurance and comfort to the righteous.

Verse nine mentions another work of God, that of giving a true and lasting peace. This peace is not obtainable in this world by this world. God acts so as to render His enemies incapable of prosecuting their devastation by the destruction of their very implements with which they wage their evil war. *"He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire."*

Three Kinds of Peace

When the weaponry of the forces of evil is taken away, then peace can come to the people of God. There are three kinds of peace available to us: One, peace with out fellowman; Two, peace within ourselves; Three, peace with God. We can have peace with God in this life, and even to a large measure have peace within ourselves and others. But so long as there is the existence of sin and temptation, the peace of the latter two kinds can be interrupted and taken away.

As a final reassuring note, the psalmist mentions the glory of God. God is saying to a distrubed and confused world wherein we must live as His people, *"The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge."* (Verse eleven). This companionship and fellowship with God will be sufficient for all our needs. The following makes the point quite well:

Two painters each painted a picture representing his conception of the peace that Jesus gives. The first chose for his scene a lone sea nestled away in the mountains. It was a calm sea. Not a breeze was blowing. Not a ripple disturbed the surface. Not a cloud was in the sky. It was night and the bright moon was casting her reflection on the mirror of the placid water.

The second painter there on his canvass another sea. It was a wild and restless sea. The biostrous wind was beating upon its bosom and giant waves were rolling and foaming in their fury. Every tree on the shore was bending to the might of the terrific storm. Out of the midst of the angry sea and above the thundering waves a giant rock lifted its head. In the top of the rock a dove had built her nest. There she found repose. There she was resting, undisturbed and unafraid.

The latter scene, and not the former, describes the peace that Jesus gives. The first is only stagnation; the last is peace. In the peace that comes from above there are two elements; calm and storm; tranquility and commotion; silence and turbulence; inward stillness and outward strife. The Lord does not promise his people a peace of perfect surroundings, or ideal circumstances. He does not guarantee them immunity from trials, persecutions, reverses, opposition, temptations, unjust criticisms, tribulations and such like. No, not at all. "*In the world ye have tribulation,*" He said. Instead He gives his people peace in spite of these things. Within the soul of that man who trusts the divine power and walks humbly with his God there is established a holy calm that refuses to be disturbed by the angry elements around him and beneath him. He has made the Rock of Ages his refuge. He is not afraid.

Because of God's judgment against evil, and His granting peace to His own, His matchless and boundless glory, we can take heart and be comforted and have no fear in our restless and turbulent world.

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The Old, Old Story

The story of the Bible is not the history of mankind. The story of the Bible is the story of the redemption of man from sin. In this lesson we shall provide an overview of this story.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." (Genesis 1:1). In six days God created this entire, immense, complex and precise universe, supplying it with the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms. On the sixth day He created His most glorious creation, man and woman, Adam and Eve. Because mankind is in the spiritual image of God, man is the superior of all that God created. On the seventh day God rested, or ceased His creation.

God placed man in the Paradise of the Garden of Eden, mankind's first home. But man rebelled against God, eating the forbidden fruit, transgressing God's command, bringing sin into the world and severing himself from the fellowship with God that he formerly enjoyed. Man was driven from the garden, from the tree of life, apart from God and doomed.

Genesis 3:15 offers the first hint of God's intent to redeem man from sin. *"And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."* This was part of God's curse against Satan and God's promise of man's salvation.

Sin and the Flood

Sin found fertile soil in the mind and actions of mankind. God directed Cain and Abel to worship, commanding an animal sacrifice. But not unlike many people today, one did as he was directed, and the other did what he wanted. Abel's sacrifice was accepted and Cain's rejected. This caused Cain to grow jealous and commit the first murder, killing his brother Abel.

As the world became more populated it grew worse. *"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air, for it repenteth me that I have made them. But*

Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” (Genesis 6:5-8).

Obeying God’s instructions to build an ark, Noah and his family, a total of eight souls, were spared the destruction of the universal flood.

Following the flood, beginning with Noah’s family, the earth was populated again. But mankind continued to pursue ways that were contrary to the will of the Creator. They were then directed by God to scatter throughout the earth, but they chose rather to be centrally located and built a tower to thier own glory. They wished to make a name for themselves. But God frustrated their plans, confusing their language, making this tower impossible. The tower is called the Tower of Babel, which means confusion.

Call to Abraham

In time, God called Abram to leave his idolatrous homeland in Ur of the Chaldee. God gave him many great promises. Abram was promised that he would become the father of a great nation which would have a land of their own that God would give them. Those that blessed him would be blessed and those that cursed him would be cursed. There would be descendants as numerous as the sands of the sea and the stars of the heavens. Most important of all the promises, in his “seed” all the families or nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:2,3). From this point in the Bible going forward, all the rest is the story of the fulfillment of God’s promises to Abram, and the “seed” was Jesus Christ (Galations 3:16).

Abram’s name was changed to Abraham. He came to Canaan. Abraham was a man of great faith and was called the friend of God. He became the father of the Hebrew people.

His promised son was named Isaac, and Isaac’s son was Jacob. God’s plan was to be fulfilled through Jacob and his descendants. Jacob’s name was changed to Israel, which means “prince of God,” and Jacob became the father of twelve sons who became the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel.

In Egypt

Jacob’s favorite son was Joseph. The jealousy of Joseph’s brothers caused them to sell him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him. Though a series of injustices came upon Joseph, it all eventually resulted in him being raised to second in power

in the land of Egypt. Because he was an able man, with the help and providence of God, he interpreted Pharaoh's dream that warned of seven years of plenty that would be followed by seven years of famine. Joseph advised Pharaoh to appoint an administrator to preserve the food during the good years so there would be ample supply during the years of famine. Pharaoh appointed Joseph.

When the famine years came, not only did Egypt suffer, but also Canaan where lived Jacob and Joseph's brothers. The brothers came to Egypt to buy grain. In time, after much intrigue, deception, investigation and inquiry, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers and sent for Jacob. The entire household of Jacob moved to Egypt and were given the land of Goshen in which to live.

Following the death of Jacob, and then Joseph (Exodus 1:7-10), things took a dramatic and tragic change for the worse for the Israelites who were growing rapidly in number. The Pharaoh became afraid of their growth and used numerous means to suppress their increase, but Israel continued to grow. In the midst of these conditions, with slavery now imposed upon the Israelites and their young sought until killed, Moses was born. Hidden during his infancy among the reeds of the river, he was eventually discovered by Pharaoh's daughter who took him as her own son to be reared as her son in the Egyptian palace. There Moses lived the first forty years of his life.

When he was forty he made a premature attempt to bring relief for the Israelites and his efforts resulted in the necessity for him to flee Egypt for his life. He went to Midian where he tended the flocks and herds of Jethro who became his father-in-law. There he lived another forty years.

Exodus

At the age of eighty, God called Moses out of the burning bush and commissioned him to return to Egypt and lead Israel out of bondage and into the land that God had promised Abraham. With Aaron, his brother, Moses began the task that would occupy him the last forty years of his life. By working miracles, bringing plagues against Egypt, Moses finally coerced Pharaoh to let God's people go. They crossed the Red Sea and marched toward Mount Sinai where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments and all the rest of the Mosaic Law that was to guide Israel through every phase of their existence for the next

fifteen hundred years.

Finally, the mantle of leadership fell from the shoulder of Moses and was given to Joshua. By now Israel had wandered forty years in the wilderness.

Canaan

Joshua led Israel in taking Canaan from the heathen people that occupied it, beginning with Jericho. After taking Canaan, the Israelites lived the next three hundred years under a decentralized government of Judges, men that God would raise up in times of crisis to be leaders of the people. We read during these years of such men as Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, Samuel and others.

But Israel, seeking to be like the nations around them, demanded a king. God granted them their rebellious desire and the first king was Saul, then David, then Solomon. It was David who brought the nation into power and prominence and Solomon who heaped lavish wealth and glory on it so that all nations admired the brilliance of Israel. It was to be through David, the descendant of Jacob, that God would bring about the fulfillment of His promise to bless all nations.

After Solomon the nation divided into two nations, the ten tribes of the north called Israel, and the two tribes of the south called Judah. Through many years these nations existed side by side, sometimes as enemies, sometimes indifferent to each other, sometimes as allies. Israel grew worse and worse, disregarding the work of such prophets as Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Amos, Hosea and others. God eventually allowed Assyria to overrun Israel and take them away in captivity from which they never returned as a nation.

Southern Judah lasted about one hundred thirty-five years longer. All of Judah's kings were of the family of David. Its history is characterized by much evil, with sprinklings of revival now and again. But failing to heed the lesson of their northern cousins, their wickedness brought them into captivity by the Babylonians which lasted for seventy years before they were allowed under the Persians to return to their homeland.

With the urging of such prophets as Haggai, Malachi and others, men like Zerrubabel, Ezra and Nehemiah led the people in restoring the nation. The temple was rebuilt; the walls of Jerusalem was raised again, and a great religious revival was experienced in the nation is Israel.

Lord to Come

In the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, we read a prophecy of one who was to come to prepare the way for the coming of the Lord. *"Behold, I will send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me... And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers..."* (Malachi 3:1; 4:6). *"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord."* (Malachi 4:5). This is a prophecy of the coming of John the Baptist which is explained in detail in the New Testament record.

Here the Old Testament story ends and some four hundred years pass before the time when the New Testament record resumes the old, old story. Between these testaments during this four hundred year span, secular history shows the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecies, particularly of Daniel two. Following the Babylonian empire there came Persia, then Greece and eventually Rome. Palestine was under the occupation of the Romans when John the Baptist came on the scene and when Jesus the Christ was born. John came preaching repentance, preparing the way for Christ, just as Malachi had prophesied. John preached that the *"kingdom is at hand."*

Enter Christ

"But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law." (Galatians 4:4). God, through love, mercy and grace, sent His Son, born of the virgin, reared under the Mosaic Law, living a perfect life during thirty-three and one-half years on earth, to complete God's plan for redeeming man from sin.

Jesus provided abundant evidence that He was the Son of God, Deity in the flesh. He performed miracles, taught God's will, fulfilled prophecies, lived perfectly, and completed the system of salvation that had been in the mind of God from before the foundation of the world, dying on the cross of Calvary for the sin of mankind, raised the third day following His burial, ascending in heaven to the right hand of God where He now rules and reigns over His kingdom, the church, which began on the first Pentecost after His ascension.

Before He ascended He gave His apostles that great charge or commission to *"God ye into all the world and preach the gospel"*

to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved and he that believeth not shall be damned.” (Mark 16:15,16). Such has been the charge to God’s people since.

Kingdom Comes

On that notable day of Pentecost, Peter, with the other apostles, being guided by the Holy Spirit, preached the gospel of salvation in the name of Christ. The promises of the kingdom had been fulfilled and the Savior was a reality. Those who heard that sermon believed what they heard, obeyed the commands to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38), and were added to the church (Acts 2:47). All of the conditions that had been foretold that would mark the coming of the kingdom culminated on that day. The kingdom was called the church.

The Word of God spread throughout the world. From that time until this day those who hear, believe and obey the gospel of Christ become spiritual children of God with the duty and privilege to live their lives in the manner of God’s Word. They know that if they are faithful and steadfast, unmoveable and always abounding in the work of the Lord, when the time comes for them to leave this life via death that they shall be in the hands of their heavenly Father and will be ushered into eternal glory in heaven after the resurrection and judgment. *“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.”* (Revelation 14:13).

The story of the Bible is a glad tidings, but it also has a tragic note about it. Those who do not come to Christ through obedience to the gospel have the assurance that they shall be banished into an eternal torment of hell.

This is the old, old story of Jesus and His love; or the redemption of mankind. This is the theme of the Bible with the central theme of redemption and the central person, Christ. Here is the revelation of God’s love and manifestations of it. Here we have God’s own revelation of His will for His creatures. Thank God He loved us to provide for us redemption and the old, old story how He has made it possible for us to live eternally in the glories of heaven.

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Is the Church a Dynamic Force in the World?

At the end of the eighteenth century it was estimated that twenty-five per cent of the world was called "Christian." This was to use the term "Christian" very loosely, not Biblically. Even so, nearly two hundred years later it is estimated that less than eight per cent of the world can be so identified. Some have estimated as low as four per cent. This is sobering, especially when we realize how all that is called "Christian" most certainly does not deserve the name according to the Bible.

Yet, many who are truly Christians see no need for concern or alarm and are evidently content to bask themselves in the artificial light of indifference, lukewarmness and half-hearted service to God. If this year you earned twenty-five thousand dollars, but the next you would only earn eight, possibly four, would you be concerned? This is happening to the so-called "Christian" world, and still many sing, "I love thy kingdom, Lord," and will not even attend worship services faithfully, let alone govern their daily lives according to Biblical teaching.

Not many miles from where I once preached regularly, in one community there were about one hundred fifty families that stated in a census that they "preferred" the church of Christ and would be interested in establishing a new congregation. Yet, of those families two out of three were not even faithful at the time. They gave as their excuse, "There is no church nearby." Three to five congregations were within five miles of their residences. Some of these people drove from fifteen to twenty miles each day to their jobs. Such is an example of the spiritual poverty in the minds and lives of many who have been baptized. There is a void where there ought to be devotion, dedication and fervor for truth. That very attitude has sabotaged and nearly paralyzed the church for decades, and it has infected congregations everywhere. There is no excuse for it.

The Charge to Keep

Is the church today a dynamic force in the world? Jesus said, *"Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the*

name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.” (Matthew 28:19,20). Far too many have never grasped the seriousness and extensiveness of the great commission. Without being cynical or belittling of noble efforts many have made and continue to make, too often the great commission in modern practice has been, “Go ye therefore and have some kind of church among people of good reputation and financial means, with a building the community will respect, hire a preacher, and conduct services.”

You may think this is an unfair evaluation of things. But it is time for putty-minded and unstable brethren to awaken to the facts of reality regarding the churches of Christ and cease living in a make-believe world that all is well or thinking the church is really packing a punch. Only in a few rare instances has the influence of professed New Testament Christians been felt with the distinctiveness that is supposed to characterize the faith of Christ.

In Jesus’ day the power of Rome spread its tentacles over most of the known world. There was an increasing degradation among the nations and a growing contempt for law and order. Religion was overrun by paganism and seemed to make little difference in the way people lived and conducted their lives. There was religion, but precious little righteousness.

Turned Upside Down

But the religious world suddenly shook from the impact of a force that was felt throughout the entire Roman Empire. The new faith became the main topic of conversation. It was discussed on every corner, and even in the palaces of the worldly elite. It aroused everyone from emperors to the lowliest beggars and humblest peasants. That new force was the faith of Jesus Christ and the influence His church was having in the world as the message of truth was being proclaimed.

What were these people who had been purchased by the blood of Christ doing to make such an impression? They were not trying to make an impression simply for the purpose of making an impression. That can be done many ways. They were preaching an unadulterated, uncompromised, pure and powerful gospel of Christ. They condemned the sins of men by the authority of God and proclaimed the way of salvation

through Christ. They coupled their words with their deeds.

People from all walks of life took notice and many were added to their ranks. They insisted upon a loving submission to Christ and obedience to His will. Their efforts were often met with fierce, even violent, opposition, hatred, persecution and rejection.

But their faith was a dynamic force in their world. *"They turned the world upside down"* and "filled" the places where they lived with their message. The church everywhere was spoken against because it was known everywhere by the distinctive, authoritative inspired message it preached and lived. The world was not able to ignore it. They knew it existed and why. Those who opposed it could not withstand the truth. The truth was evidenced in the lives of the disciples. Can we say that this is the case with the churches of Christ in our own day?

Take a Look

Let us lift up our eyes and see our world. Theft, wordliness, immorality, drunkenness, divorce, drugs, false doctrines, atheism, humanism, riotous living, delinquency, indency, pornography, lawlessness, wars, vice, abortion, child abuse, secularism, materialism, greed, evolution, crime and worldly living are running rampant and unchecked. These are the traits of our day. You need not trespass the boundaries of your own area where you live to note such crimes against both God and man among the populace. Why does not the Lord's church affect the world more effectively?

There are too many who sit in the pews of the buildings who would not have the pure gospel preached in the condemnation of sin if they had their way about it. They do not want anybody to cross anybody else regardless of what is being said or done. They prefer that all anybody does is to soothe the one next to him. Conformity to the world and compromise with error is more the concern of many than conversion to Christ and living like a Christian.

This world is a sinful place. *"And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness."* (First John 5:19). Since when has it been the case that God wants the sinner to be anything but ill at ease in the light of the gospel? The gospel is a gospel of peace only when people accept it and conform to it. Too many so-called "Christians" have swallowed compromise and sin and have sought the means of diplomacy,

tact, scholarship and deception as the solution to man's ills rather than repentance and obedience to the truth. They have longed to "go along" with everything around them and have decided to they will not walk in the "*old paths, where is the good way.*" (Jeremiah 6:16). They seek religious respectability before the community at the sacrifice of the narrowness and precision of the gospel and the person, Jesus Christ. Such is an embarrassment to them. They are ashamed of the gospel. There is such a need for brethren who will send forth sound words and sound doctrine and condemn the sins of the world and proclaim the way of holiness as the only way like the Bible teaches. We have for too long drifted away from that to have much of an impact on anybody. How can we expect to be a dynamic force in the world for good when we have become so much like the world? Surely, one reason persecution is seldom coming from the devil is because we are not bothering him very much.

Beg Brethren

Something is dreadfully amiss when professed believers have to be begged to even worship regularly. Only about one out of five can be aroused to really be concerned about sending the gospel to places other than where they are. Some have the money to build playgrounds and gymnasiums but have no money to help struggling works less than a day's drive from their cathedral-like buildings and playrooms. We have such little concern for the Far and Middle East, South America, etc., as well as vast regions in our own nation that know not God. Being bogged down in pettiness, having to expend so much of our energies in fighting a rearguard action against liberalism and digression, the church has retreated into a declining position. There is more concern among many with building colleges than establishing congregations. Those who want to follow the New Testament pattern are being ridiculed as old-fashioned, uneducated traditionalists. Money, men and materials have been channeled into gimmicks and gadgets for getting crowds and what have we reaped? The church has fewer and fewer people who really know and stand for the truth and less influence than anytime in our lifetime. Just why some persist in wanting to follow the lead of those who have led us into paths of decline is beyond us to understand.

The politics among preachers and the propaganda of compromise among papers has dulled the sensitivity of brethren

to the seriousness of sin and the mission of the church. While the early church turned the world upside down the world today scarcely knows the churches of Christ exist.

The first church would not allow people to think one god was just as good as the true God. They would not compromise any point of truth for advantage to themselves, for business, power, prestige, popularity or advancement. They declared in no uncertain terms the "*whole counsel of God*" and people knew the difference between truth and error whether they accepted that difference or not. The early church was not afraid of being labeled as extremists and radicals when they were only standing for the truth. They knew what they believed and practiced and knew why. Their faith was extreme and radical compared to the heathenism, paganism and sinfulness around them. They were neither ashamed nor afraid to be persecuted for righteous' sake.

They refused to look upon Jesus Christ as only one among many alternatives. They considered Him the One and exclusive way to God and said so. Their view of their faith was that it was applicable to the whole world, not just a few. The gospel is for all because all need the gospel because all have sinned and all need to be saved. They were not content to simply preach to themselves and among themselves, but went out into the world.

They did not enter the service of Christ with reservations, but with a commitment to follow Him in every way, every day. They did not put the things of this life first. They would not condone sin among themselves. They were willing to die before they would surrender God's truth.

It Could Be

The church today could be a dynamic force in the world, but it is not fair to say that the anemic demonstration of faith we see today is much of a force. We must return to the way, manner and message of the early church when it did make an impact on the world. We must regain a world-wide view of things. Many do not even have a very wide community view. Some are content to "go along" with just about anything, everything, anybody and everybody if it involves friends, favorites or family. Too many are happy to just "keep house" and "play church." Well, that will not get done what God expects us to get done. Such conduct may ease the consciences of some but it will not save the lost nor retain the saved.

When we realize the world must be staggered into the

realization that it is doomed in sin and bound for hell, then possibly some in the world will be sufficiently aroused to investigate the truth. Before we save the world we must shake the world from its complacency and indifference toward God and sin. We have to challenge people before we can change them to God's way. We must show the world that being a Christian makes a difference before we can convince them that it does by mere words.

Is the church a dynamic force in our world? Only in spots here and there, now and then. As we said before, most do not even know the New Testament church exists or that it matters whether it exists or not. They are steeped in this world, in various religions, in nothingness, to the point that the feeble presentation of a compromised message that too often is being preached does not make an impact. But that can change. Whether it will or not remains to be seen. What do you intend to do about it?

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What Is Your Excuse?

"Then said he unto them, A certain man made a great supper and bade many; and sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and showed his lord these things. Then the master of the house, being angry, said unto his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in hither the poor, the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, that none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper." (Luke 14:16-24).

The Parable

The first part of our lesson will be an analysis of the parable the Lord taught. A certain man prepared a feast and extended invitations to many. When all was ready, everyone who had accepted the invitation were told to come. But rather than coming, they began to make excuses for not coming.

This angered the host and he invited others to take their places. Those least expected to be invited were invited. Those who had been invited but refused to come would now not be allowed to come at all.

Notice the excuses. One bought land which he claimed he had never even seen. It is not likely he was even telling the truth but simply offering a wild excuse.

Another said he had bought oxen without knowing their ability to work and needed to find out their worth. This was doubtless a lie for who would ever make a purchase on that basis? It was but an excuse.

Another said he had married and gave no further explanation but just rejected the invitation forthwith.

Notice that the master of the house, the host, did not believe any of the excuses were valid or sufficient for refusing to partake of what had been prepared.

God Rejects Excuses

So it is with the Lord and us. Jesus taught this parable to teach us the mind and attitude of God. He has provided us a spiritual feast. Not all are willing to accept His invitation. Not all who have accepted it shall enter into His great feast because they are loaded with excuses for not doing what they ought. As the host in the parable was angered with those who flippantly excused themselves, so God is displeased when people reject His calling through the gospel. God has never accepted man's excuses for not doing what God has directed man to do. We need to learn this.

When God called Moses at the burning bush to lead Israel out of Egypt, Moses offered several excuses why he could not and should not do it. In the New Testament Felix heard Paul preach the gospel but offered as an excuse for not obeying that it was not a convenient time for him. God did not accept the excuses of Moses, nor will He accept the excuses of anyone for disobedience. Yet, many today still will attempt to get around

doing what God teaches by offering excuses. If there is not some hindrance that can be overcome, it is something else invented to justify self for not doing God's will. Is not this a foolish path to follow, knowing that God will not accept excuses?

What are some of the excuses people offer for not being a child of God? One that is mentioned may be your excuse!

No Need

"I live a good life. I do not need to be a Christian." Some think that they are already Christian anyway even though they have not obeyed the gospel and never reached the blood of Christ. These people have the idea that becoming a Christian is only something really bad people need to do but not those who are moral, even religious.

It is true that there are people whose lives would not have to be changed very much to live a Christian life because they are already doing many things that should characterize a Christian. But morality is not sufficient to make one a child of God, even though morality is essential to go to heaven.

To be saved one must live a good moral life, but he also must be "*in Christ*." Salvation is "*in Christ*" (Second Timothy 2:10). Those out of Christ are lost in their sins. Even that good and moral law-abiding citizen who is religious and is a good neighbor is not "*in Christ*" until he obeys the gospel of Christ, being baptized to reach the saving blood of Christ. If one could be a child of God while remaining out of Christ, pray tell me why Jesus ever had to leave heaven at all? Salvation is dependent upon the righteousness of Christ, and out of Christ man has no access to heaven. Christ is the only way to be saved (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). The Bible is clear on this.

In Acts ten we read about the good and moral man named Cornelius. But he was lost. This is why Peter came to teach him and tell him what to do to be saved. When he learned what to do, he did it.

Too Evil

But some have the very opposite excuse. They contend, "I am too evil. God would never forgive me of all the wrongs I have done." Somehow, they have the idea that only good people ever come to God. The fact that one does realize he is a sinner is in his favor because now he knows he needs a Savior.

That Savior is Jesus Christ.

"But there are some things I must change before I become a Christian. I must learn to do better, leave off bad language, evil habits, sinful things of my life. Then I will come." But do you really think you can overcome evil by yourself? If you could, why did Christ die for you? Do you not know that with God's help you receive as His child that overcoming your sinful manners can be more easily accomplished? What ever gives a person the idea that he has to become perfect before he can be cleansed of sin? Christians are not perfect people. They are people who have come to Christ by obeying the gospel to be washed clean of sins by His blood and having been forgiven are striving with all their heart, soul, mind and strength to walk after the way of Christ. If we all waited until we had Satan defeated then there would be no need for Christ. We cannot defeat the devil by ourselves.

Yes, there are some things one needs to change, like attitude toward sin, one's mind about Christ, repentance being essential. But once you have reached His blood by being baptized into His death you begin to grow stronger as a spiritual child of God, resisting temptation because you will have the encouragement, motivation, goal and desire to overcome in order to remain faithful to the One who died for you.

Hypocrites

"But there are just too many hypocrites in the church." Here we can agree. Even if there is only one, that is too many. It is good for one to have a distaste for hypocrisy. Such a person will likely try very hard to be loyal and faithful as a child of God once he has come to Christ. He recognizes the inconsistency of sinful living as a Christian. Would that all did!

But nobody shall ever be excused from their duty before God because somebody else failed in his or her duty. We are not saved by the sins of hypocrites but by the blood of Christ. We cannot hide behind the sins of hypocrites and expect God to overlook our deliberate disobedience.

If you do not like hypocrites, then why are you living outside of Christ and heading for the same eternal destination as they where you will be locked together for eternity? Does that make much sense? Who can explain that?

Furthermore, not everybody in the church is a hypocrite. Why not focus your attention on those who are honest, sincere,

steadfast, righteous and working at the task rather than being blinded by some few who are hypocrites? Let's face reality. Hypocrisy among Christians is a hindrance to many, but neither the hypocrite nor the one who uses the hypocrite as an excuse shall escape the wrath of God.

After all, no hypocrite is our standard. Not even those who we consider righteous are the standard. Christ is the standard. Follow Him. We need to remember, not everyone who stumbles and falls is a hypocrite. Some are weak, growing, trying hard against many difficulties and doing the best they can. But they know they must be "*in Christ*," and are not trying to hide behind somebody else, making excuses, for disobeying God.

Don't Know Enough

"But I don't know enough to become a Christian." That may be true in many cases. There are some things one must know before he or she can obey the gospel. But a study of the book of Acts will soon equip you with sufficient information to obey. In Acts eight the Ethiopian obeyed after he was taught one lesson. Likewise was it true with Lydia and the jailer in Acts sixteen. Sure, they had some background, but that is easily gained. We must make the start!

We must know that God is; that sin is real; that sin separates us from God; that we all sin; that we must be rid of the guilt of sin; that we cannot save ourselves by ourselves; that we need a Savior; that God has provided a Savior; the Savior is Jesus Christ. We must know that He lived, died, was buried and rose again, ascending on high to His throne over His kingdom the church. We must know the church is composed of the saved and to become one of the saved we must be washed clean of sin by the blood of Christ which we reach when we obey the gospel, believing that Jesus is the Christ, repenting of sins, confessing our faith in Christ, and being baptized into Him for the remission of sins. It is then we reach the saving blood and rise to walk as a new creature in newness of life.

We also must know that our Savior expects and commands loyal faithfulness to walk as He walked. This involves living life. We have the promise that those who do such things shall live with God eternally. This we must know. Now, you already know that even if you never knew it before now.

I'll Wait

Some excuse themselves on the basis that they want to wait! Wait for what? Wait until I am older, or until my mate comes with me, or until this or that. But God does not want you to wait if you see your duty and recognize your responsibility. He expects you to obey. Your coming could also be an encouragement another needs to also come. Why do you wait? What do you expect to gain by waiting? You might well lose everything by waiting.

After all is offered, whatever be the excuse, think more clearly and you will understand that whatever be the excuse, God does not accept excuses. It really matters very little what kind of excuse one might concoct. Until he obeys the gospel he is lost and if he dies that way he will forever be lost!

People sometimes say they are afraid they cannot hold out faithful. Good for you! At least you are aware you must be faithful! Some contend the family might object. So what? We must please God more than anyone else!

Think about it! When you stand before God in judgment, and there is His Son who gave all for you, do you really think some excuse is going to cause God to grant you salvation anyway? You have been warned, and kindly so. Give heed!

The story of the life of some people is, "*They began to make excuse.*" What a reason for spending eternity in hell and missing the eternal joys of heaven! Obey today!

† † † † †

"For it was said to me by the word of the Lord, Thou shalt eat no bread nor drink water there, nor turn again to go by the way that thou earnest." (First Kings 13:17).

The prophet was explaining his actions. To him, at that time, it was enough that "*the word of the Lord*" had instructed him what to do. He needed no further direction.

When people have enough respect for God, then "*the word of the Lord*" will be enough for them. Love for God means obedience to His Word (First John 5:3). JWB

The Forks of the Road

There are numerous times in the course of life that we come to what we call "the forks of the road," by which we mean we must make a decision which direction we intend to go. We often delight in making choices, but sometimes choices are imposed upon us whether we like it or not.

Making decisions is a very important matter. Our lives on earth as well as our eternal destiny is determined by the choices and decisions that we make. The time of choosing is both one of potential danger but also one of great opportunity.

In our daily lives we must make decisions in matters that often are not too grave. The most serious matter we shall ever consider has to do with who we will serve in life, God through Jesus Christ, or self.

History and Scripture both show how the Lord's church has had to make decisions and choices which way to go. In both Old and New Testaments we have record of God's people choosing this way or that way; sometimes to their benefit and the glory of God; sometimes to their detriment because they did not choose to follow God's way.

The church in our county, as

well as elsewhere, exists in crucial days. With digression threatening on every hand, false doctrines being preached and endorsed by some, we have the necessity to either choose to stand by the faith without compromise or "go along to get along" with false ways and those that promote them. Since error is being injected into the ranks of the church, brethren everywhere are having to make the decision whether to please God or others.

Joshua proposed to Israel to choose whom they would serve, but he announced his determination that he would serve the Lord (Joshua 24:15). Every church, elder, preacher, Christian brother or sister must make the same choice as did he. Anything less will be wrong.

It is disturbing to observe how some seem to find it difficult to decide whether they will fellowship error or stand for the truth. This ought not require second thought. We must obey God regardless of how this affects our relationship with others. It is our prayer that brethren in this county will prove their loyalty to truth in these crucial times of potential apostasy and hold fast the sound words of the doctrine of Christ with kindness and firmness. Would the Lord be pleased with anything else?

Damage from Drinking and Dancing

Worldliness among members of the church continues to be a damaging effect on the cause of Christ. Little wonder that some outside of the church see no advantage to being in the church because some in the church act like those who do not care for the church.

I know of one "preacher" who told me that he personally opposes dancing but has never preached on the subject where he preaches. Well, he is not opposed to it much or he would have enough courage and love for the truth and his people to preach on it and condemn it for the sin that it is. When you hear and see what the members of that congregation are saying and doing you soon realize that drinking and dancing are as much a part of their lives as breathing and the fact that both are condemned in Scripture makes no difference to them whatsoever. But it has influence on others!

More than once those outside the church have commented regarding the people of that congregation and they have no respect for them. The trouble is, they lose respect for the church everywhere because these worldly members have so sorely misrepresented the church. For shame!



JAMES W. BOYD

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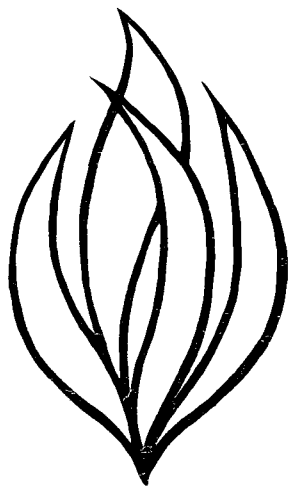
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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).



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Things That Make for Peace

John 17:20,21 *"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."*

Ephesians 4:4-6, *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*

Philippians 2:2, *"Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind."*

First Corinthians 1:10-15, *"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no division among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name."*

A common theme that runs through all of these passages is unity, peace among brethren, harmony among God's people. That the early Christians considered oneness as a vital ingredient in their faith is beyond dispute. Through the years faithful Christians have deplored religious division, even warring against it, exposing its causes, not only that which is propagated by denominationalism, but division in the ranks of the body of Christ.

Harm of Division

Division among Christian brethren is even more damaging to the cause of Christ than the religious division that characterizes the world. But such has been experienced since the beginning of the church in various quarters. Division in a local congregation is one of the worst tragedies that can be experienced in the

spiritual life of a Christian. The frustration, hurt, heartache and harm that is done leaves scars on the lives of all involved, and the handicaps on the church may take generations to remove.

The early church heard, taught and practiced religious oneness. Acts 2:46,47, *"And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."* This is a wonderful statement of unity, peace, cooperation, harmony and oneness among brethren.

Paul wrote in Romans 14:19, *"So then, let us follow after things that make for peace."* There are those things that divide. But there are also those things that make for peace. Peace can be the rule (Colossians 3:15), and God's people can be united. We are called to peace (First Corinthians 7:15).

Who Prefers Division?

I find it hard to believe that there are many people who would prefer problems, strife, conflict, division and contentions rather than unity, harmony and peace. There may be some, but not many. To be sure, there are those who prefer to have their own way in everything rather than have peace, just as there are those, who, for the sake of peace, are willing to sacrifice truth and compromise what is not theirs to compromise. But division is often the result of pettiness and jealousy. While we want peace, and should work for peace, peace at any price is a price that is too high. Our cry must be for unity based on truth, not at the sacrifice of truth. But most want peace. How can one claim to believe the Bible and not want the unity and oneness it teaches? Possibly we are not as aware as we ought to be of those things that make for peace.

We have to be idealistic, but at the same time, realistic. It is not likely that there will be religious peace here on earth. Life would be much easier and more pleasant if it could exist. The same could be said of division among Christian brethren. But many divisions can be corrected and avoided if we will learn what makes for peace. Actually, unity begins with the individual assuming his personal responsibility to work for it. Like the phrase, "A better world begins with me," so the thought, "Unity begins with me." We want to mention five things that make for peace and that result in happiness, joy and fellowship that God

want among His people.

Love

First Corinthians 16:14, *"Let all that you do be done in charity."* This strikes at the very source of strife and conflict because it deals with the heart and the motive behind all actions. It deals with the greatest of all emotions, and that is love. Love prompts many things, but Paul said to let love be the motive behind everything. Like a good parent who does everything that he does for the child out of a motive of love, whether it is comforting, sympathizing, feeding, correcting, chastening, everything is done through love, so should all our motives be. Christians are to love God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, God's Word, the saved, the lost, even enemies if such we have. Have you ever noticed how all of God's commands, instructions and prohibitions are motivated by His love for mankind and how He seeks man's highest good in everything? He loves those He chastens (Hebrews 12:6). Love is a Godlike motive (John 3:16). Love will help bring peace.

Selflessness

Philippians 2:3,4, *"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others."* This is a negative approach to the same positive teaching we have just considered. Paul admonishes that we not let faction, strife, selfishness lead us in what we say and do. A factious man, even when he is right, stirs up division. Usually he is wrong, not only in what he is promoting but the manner he is doing it. Vanity, pride, self-glory and the ambition to be considered "somewhat" is often behind the actions of people. It seems almost impossibly for some to ever admit, "I was wrong." How can the error of division be overcome when such attitudes prevail? Motives of jealousy, vengeance, self-superiority, stubbornness and self-righteousness all contribute to division. We must look on the positive side to the humility and lowliness of mind taught by Paul and Peter (First Peter 5:5-7). We just do not behave in such evil manners toward those we love by berating, unjustly criticizing, picking and finding fault however insignificant the matter may be. Most of us could really improve in this area.

Truth

Closely akin to these things is the teaching of Paul in Ephesians 4:15, "*Speaking the truth in love.*" We have stressed the necessity of love and now wish to stress the necessity of truth. There cannot be unity that God approves without truth. God does not smile upon all unity, nor does He condemn all division. He makes division necessary in some instances, such as when there be those who do not have a love for the truth and those who love the truth cannot and should not remain in fellowship among them. There is not approved peace unless the harmony is founded and grounded upon the truth. Where truth is neglected there should be division unless all go the way of error. Error cause division; not truth.

We should speak "*sound doctrine*" (Titus 2:1); "*sound speech*" (Titus 2:8). There are those who receive "*not the love of the truth*" (Second Thessalonians 2:10). The Word of God is truth (John 17:17). In the same prayer where Jesus prayed for unity He defined truth as God's Word. The two are inseparable; truth and peace.

Too often there be those who wish to use the "soft pedal" on certain truth, hoping the benign neglect of it will avoid strife. But avoiding truth is at the heart of contentions. Error cannot be "swept under the rug" as if it did not exist. Some rebel at the exposure of such sins as social drinking, dancing, adultery, lying, materialistic greed, theft, divorce, absenteeism, etc. There is not a subject in the Bible at which somebody, sometime, does not raise objection to the truth about it. But dodging truth creates no peace. It only strengthens the power of evil that would suppress truth. We can know this even if we did not know a Word of the Bible. Just look around you in the affairs of the world and see if the suppression of truth is not a vicious cause of division.

We show the love we are to have by teaching and standing for the truth, living the truth, defending it, and not withholding it. Who could doubt Paul's love for others. He labored night and day with tears, publicly and privately, from house to house, and said, Acts 20:28, "*Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.*"

Standing Firm

The weakness of Protestantism is evident in its contention to “agree to disagree,” seeking peace without contending for the faith, ignoring differences, brushing aside errors as if they did not matter. Has it brought unity among Protestants? No, nor shall it ever bring unity. If people want peace, including brethren, the truth must dominate. It cannot be accomplished by mergers, union meetings, resolution, “summits,” restructuring the church to accomodate division, or trying to convert God to accept man regardless of what man does, says, thinks or wants. This doctrine, “I’m O.K. and you’re O.K.” is foolishness. Some believe “everything is beautiful in its own way.” More folly! We must stand stedfastly by the oracles of God without wavering if there is to be the unity that God approves.

While we do this we must be gentle, meek, kind as well as strong and firm (Second Timothy 2:23,24; Galatians 6:1). Standing firm does not require bitterness, harshness or self-righteousness. Unfortunately, some must consider strong words to be opposite of gentleness and meekness. But consider again the preaching of Christ and His apostles, who were both strong and gentle. Being gentle is not being weak. Meekness is not the same as weakness. Anger is not the same as courage.

Consider how the good surgeon wields his scaphel with precision, firm and bold, but gentle. So we must wield the “*sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.*” (Ephesians 6:17). Failure to be gentle is a temptation when fighting error because error is so hideous. But truth upheld gently will produce peace. True, some try to take advantage of a gentle approach and run roughshod over those who hold to truth unless a more forceful manner is used. But this is a serious problem for them and we ought not imitate them.

Discipline

There is another measure that makes for peace and that is not as easily done as said, but necessary betimes. Romans 16:17, “*Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.*” Disciplinary actions may be the only way to maintain peace. Withholding fellowship from those among us who do evil, teach falsely, is necessary to preserve unity when the evildoer will not repent. True, disciplinary actions divide the faithful from the unfaithful. But the source of the problem is not the discipline, but the sinfulness of those who will not turn again

coupled with the neglect of discipline. Parents know when they discipline their children there may be moments of estrangement, but the discipline did not cause it. It was caused by that which necessitated discipline.

Paul teaches in many places that there is no way to maintain peace if the peacebreakers are allowed to go unchecked. False doctrines, immorality, walking disorderly, promoting apostasy, all such causes division and those who are guilty must either repent or be disciplined for the sake of harmony and unity. In this matter the twentieth century church has been negligent beyond toleration and we are reaping the results of division and a worldly, unconverted, sin-tolerating brotherhood. Digression is evident through false doctrines taught by false doctors and too often their mouths are not stopped. Discipline must be counted among those things that make for peace.

In summary, what are the things we have mentioned in this lesson that make for peace? They are love, truth, gentleness, discipline and the restraint from doing what is done from motives of selfishness.

The best time for a congregation to learn these things is while peace prevails. Too often, if we wait until strife has invaded, emotions run too rampant for people to be objective toward the truth. While we must work for peace even in the midst of strife, it is better to work for it before strife, never surrendering to the ways of the devil that would divide the people of God.

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(from page 20)

came in sorrow, but they left in joy to tell others. All they thought and said centered on the resurrection of Christ. Its meaning was that the hope, assurances, comforts and promises the Lord had extended were certain and upon them they and all the human family can rely.

When we realize the resurrected Christ, we can grasp the same significance as did they. God's plan for the redemption of man and eternal life was now complete. As Peter wrote, teaching the necessity of baptism to be saved, he attributed the power of salvation to the resurrection of Christ (First Peter 3:21). As the crucifixion paid the penalty for our sins, the resurrection confirms the hope of eternal life. Here is the basis for Paul's declaration that Christ is the hope of glory (Colossians 1:27).

† † † † †

Is It Truth We Really Want?

During the trials of Jesus many people said many things, first one thing was heard, then another. Christ said He came into the world to bear witness of the truth. John 18:37, *"To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth."* When Jesus said this, Pilate asked, *"What is truth?"*

In the midst of so much confusion, especially the chaotic conditions that exist in the religious world, with one shouting one thing, other contending for various points of view, Pilate's question is very appropriate for our time. Some would have us believe that the only truth is that nobody can know the truth, even if it does exist. They teach that everything is relative and nothing is absolute, therefore, nobody can say anything is true and be sure about it. This doctrine carries the concept that there is no right or wrong, good or bad, except as each might feel it for himself or herself. The fundamental flaw of such a philosophy is that it is self-contradictory. If there is no truth, how can we be sure it is true that there is no truth? If nobody can be certain about anything, how can anybody be certain that nobody can be certain? If there is no right or wrong how can we know we are right and not wrong when we contend there is no right or wrong? Any position that "shoots itself in the heart" is not deserving of acceptance among intelligent people.

There is Knowledgeable Truth

The Bible affirms there is truth and truth can be known and be known to be the truth. First Timothy 4:3, it is evident that Paul believed people could *"know the truth."* Hebrews 10:26 teaches that people can receive *"the knowledge of the truth."* Jesus said, *"Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."* (John 8:32). Let us consider other passages that show us certain things about truth and let it be magnified and exalted in our thinking.

To answer Pilate's question, Christ said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life."* (John 14:6). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the demonstration, example, personification and source of truth. John 1:17, *"For the law came by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."*

Christians were sanctified, set apart from the world, into the service of God, cleansed from sin by the truth, and that truth is the Word of God. Jesus prayed, "*Sanctify them through thy truth; Thy word is truth.*" (John 17:17). Truth is said to be the fruit of the Spirit. Ephesians 5:9, "*For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth.*" The Holy Spirit was promised to the apostles that He would "*guide you into all truth.*" (John 16:13). Truth is revealed by Deity, by the Holy Spirit, through those apostles Jesus had chosen for that task.

John 3:3-5 teaches the necessity of being "*born again.*" James 1:18 tells us we are begotten "*with the word of truth.*" If there is no truth there surely cannot be a new birth. First Peter 1:23 shows we are "*born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God,*" which we have noted already is the truth. The verse preceding declared how "*ye purified your souls in obeying the truth.*"

Second Thessalonians 2:13 teaches we are chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and "*belief of the truth.*" Second Corinthians 6:4-7 declares we are approved servants of God "*by the word of truth.*" The truth is the measure and standard by which we can know.

Consider a few other scriptures to impress upon us the presence, reality and obtainability of truth. Third John 4, John said he had no greater joy than to hear that "*my children walk in truth.*" We are admonished to hold fast to the truth (First Corinthians 5:8; Second Corinthians 13:8). How could anybody do that if truth were not ascertainable, obtainable and in existence?

When Paul preached he preached truth. Acts 26:25, he spoke forth words of truth and soberness. "*We spake all things to you in truth.*" (Second Corinthians 7:14). This is enough so let us go forward.

Not All Accept Truth

In any consideration of the subject of truth we must take note that not everybody is going to believe and obey the truth. Is this not very evident, both in the Scripture record and in our own observation of the world? Jesus said, John 8:45,46, "*And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?*" Second Peter 2:2, "*And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be*

evil spoken of.” Romans 10:16, “But they have not all obeyed the gospel.” Galatians 3:1, “O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that you should not obey the truth?” Here Paul is talking to church members. Even church members do not always want the truth.

Romans 2:8 speaks of these who are contentious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness. Some resist the truth (Second Timothy 3:8), and fight against it. Paul warned of others who would turn away from the truth (Second Timothy 4:4). They preferred teachers who would tickle their ears rather than teachers to teach them the truth. So many prefer what they want rather than what they need.

Standing by the truth can win you enemies, however. Galatians 4:16, *“Am I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?”* It is obvious that the answer to the apostle’s question is a strong affirmative with some. John 8:40, *“But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth.”*

Mission of the Church

Even so, the church has as its primary mission the work of upholding and proclaiming the truth, being the *“pillar and ground of the truth.”* (First Timothy 3:15). Furthermore, we are required to expose false ways. *“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.”* (Ephesians 5:11). When Paul encountered erroneous conduct, even from leaders in the church, he said he did not give place to such a thing, no, not for an hour (Galatians 2:5). Some seem to never learn that opposing error is upholding the truth.

Pilate and Truth

With this vast array of passages before us, and there are numerous others that could be added, let us turn again to Pilate’s question, *“What is truth?”* Did Pilate really want the truth? All people do not have a love for truth (Second Thessalonians 2:10). Some *“received not the love of the truth,”* They had no appetite for it. Did Pilate? He asked for truth. He heard the truth. But he rejected the truth. Was it because what he heard was not what he wanted to hear? Did it not suit his situation at that moment? Did it leave him too obligated? If he accepted the truth, how would he get himself out of the dilemma he was handling? The fact is, Pilate was seeking some

“expedient” way to help himself, and the truth was not what he really desired. We see this in his cowardly act to wash his hands, as it were, from responsibility. His problem remained, however, because he could not so easily dismiss his duty.

Examine Thyself

Let each one examine himself. Do we really fare differently from Pilate? Does the question offend you? We like to think we are different from that man, but there is no doubt that we are subject to making the same grave error Pilate made by not really wanting to know what the truth is.

When brethren do not attend their own home congregation’s gospel meeting, will not even read good, sound, Bible materials provided them, will not bother to learn regarding grave issues facing the church, civilization, the family and young people, who act as if they are content in their ignorance and do not seem to want to know, is it unfair to ask the question, “Do they really want to know the truth?”

After nearly four decades of preaching the gospel, I am convinced most of the world does not want to know. Dealing with brethren has convinced me that many brethren do not want to know the truth. I recall one brother who was endorsing a preacher, and when I tried to show him the man was teaching falsely he would not even read the material provided him. Did he really want to know the truth?

Acts 20:26, *“I shrank not from declaring unto you the whole counsel of God.”* The Holy Spirit guided the apostles *“into all truth,”* but do we want to know what they preached?

In New Testament times some wanted only part of the truth; the part they had already obeyed; the part that harmonized with what they were already doing; the part that soothed and pleased them; the part with which they already agreed. But the rest of truth that contradicted their habits, their goals, ambitions, and exposed their false doctrines and sins, that called on them to fill their responsibilities or anything that disturbed them, they did not even want to hear it. Does this reflect an attitude of really desiring truth?

Specifics

Let me be more specific and offer a few examples. Regarding the nature of Christ, who was both human and Deity at the

same time, the truth declares that He was born of the virgin Mary, performed miracles, was resurrected from the dead. Why is it that so much of the liberal, “progressive” denominational world rejects these affirmations of Scripture? The same book that tells us anything of Christ affirms these things about Him.

Truth declares that there is the one church, His body, composed of the saved, which is His kingdom, of which we must be members if we live in heaven eternally. Why do people still contend one church is as good as another, or that you can be saved in any of them, or even in none of them if you choose? Do such people love the truth?

The same question could be asked regarding the steps of salvation, the gospel plan of faith, repentance, confession and baptism into Christ. Why do people think this can be set aside and they can successfully follow their own way that ignores God’s way? Do they want truth?

What of Us?

But before brethren get too smug, having usually agreed that the above mentioned matters are truth, how do we react when teaching is offered regarding liberal giving? What do we say and do about God’s pattern for discipline? How do we respond to the teaching against worldliness, including dancing, drinking, smoking, adultery, lying and immodesty? We do not have to ask what many brethren believe concerning faithfulness in worship. They have demonstrated that truth does not move them.

When we realize that the primary work of the church is evangelism, benevolence and edification, why is it that many can pinch the dollar regarding these things, but have no hesitancy when it comes to paving the parking lot, replacing the kitchen, sponsoring Boy Scouts or ball games? What does truth mean to those who claim to be Christians when these matters arise? While much of the world rots under pornography, abortion, drunkenness and adultery, some brethren still “mouth” against voting, obviously willing to surrender the whole of creation to the devil without even using legitimate weaponry at our disposal as responsible citizens to oppose the advance of moral degeneracy. If we be the “*salt of the earth*,” we ask again, should not truth receive more than convenient lip service?

I think these are hard, convincing and convicting questions. But what is more important? Whenever you study a lesson, attend a class, listen to a sermon, read an article, you should

ask, "Is it the truth I really want?" If it is, you will find it in Scripture and should conform to it.

Truth Abides

It is hard to fight against truth. Acts 9:5, "*It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.*" Second Corinthians 13:8 shows when we think we can oppose truth, the truth will not change. "*For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.*" God's truth does not and will not change (First Peter 1:25). Whether we want it, reject, accept it, refuse it, believe it and obey it, the truth remains the truth. We must learn to want the truth more than anything else. "*Buy the truth, and sell it not.*" (Proverbs 23:23). This must be our watchword! Let us be like Samuel. "*Speak, Lord, thy servant heareth.*" (First Samuel 3:9). David said, "*I have chosen the way of truth; thy judgments have I laid before me.*" (Psalm 119:30). Let us know when we stand for God's truth we are standing for that which shall stand forever. Psalm 100:5, "*And his truth endureth to all generations.*"

† † † † †

Strength Plus Effort

"*Yet now be strong, O Zerrubabel, saith the Lord, and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work, for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts.*" (Haggai 2:4).

The book of Ezra tells of the laying of the foundation for the second temple which was built after the return of Judah from Babylonian captivity. With eagerness and enthusiasm of the people, the debris of the ruins of the first temple was cleared away and foundations laid for the construction of the new one. But because of opposition, selfishness and indifference, the ardor and determination of the people cooled, and the work was stalled for fifteen years.

Into this stale situation God called Haggai the prophet to reprove the people for their neglect and to get them doing what they ought to be doing in rebuilding the temple. The people were shocked by the preaching they heard. It disturbed them. They had never heard anything like it and they were aroused.

The preaching did not set well with some. But the message of Haggai was just exactly what was needed. They were fortunate to have in their midst one that would tell them what they needed whether it was what they wanted or not. They needed the message that awakened them to see that their state of affairs was not good and correction was very much in order.

In time, more and more of the people saw the correctness of the message of Haggai and once again threw themselves wholeheartedly and enthusiastically into the Lord's work of rebuilding the temple.

His Message

What was it that Haggai preached? He showed them the need of the work that was before them. The Lord's house was being neglected and was allowed only second place in their activities. This is often the case with people in the church today. The church is the house of the Lord (First Timothy 3:15), and many neglect the building of it.

Haggai urged them to build that physical building. We are also urged to build up the temple of God which is the church today. Is there even one Christian who doubts for a moment the dire need to work for Christ and His church? This is so apparent that we will not belabor the point.

What Haggai taught is summarized in our text from Haggai 2:4. There were two dominant admonitions that he gave the people, to the leaders and the followers; one, be strong, and two, work. These two cannot be separated. There can be no work where there is no strength, and strength must manifest itself in the work that must be done. The message of Haggai is a modern message that the church needs now.

What Is Real Strength?

What makes a strong church? How does one tell if a church is really strong? We cannot tell by numbers because numbers do not tell the spiritual strength and faithfulness to the Word of God. Obviously, a strong church with many members is better for the cause of Christ than a strong church with few members. But strength is not determined by numbers. So often the large churches are the weakest spiritually. Some have grown numerically large because of weakness and compromise, sacrificing truth to get numbers. What a deadly price to pay for

size! Some of the greatest victories of the Bible were won by small numbers that were loyal to God. Consider Gideon against the Midianites, who defeated the Midianite hordes with three hundred men. Jehovah chose Israel, not because it was large. Once they began to depend upon their numbers they began to wane in power. Subtraction of numbers can contribute to real strength. Long ago a pioneer preacher gave a report on a gospel meeting where he did the preaching, but reported no additions, but a few subtractions and the church was in a better condition than it had been in years. The truth is a two-edged sword that will save but also drive away those whose heart does not love the truth.

A church is not strong just because it has a fine meetinghouse, large contributions, prominent community people as members or other such measures that many seem to think so important.

The church is strong when the members have a sacrificial attitude, being truly converted to Christ. A church is strong when it will stand without compromise of the truth in order to "get along" with others. The church is strong when the members live each day in a Christlike fashion, at home, school, work, wherever and whenever. The church is strong when it demands and stands for "*thus saith the Lord.*" It is a strong church where members seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness, whether it be ten people or ten thousand in number. When spiritual and heavenly concerns dominate the thoughts and lives of members, that church will be a strong church. It is when the individual members of the church are strong that the church is strong. When the church insists on the standard of the Lord, and is willing to exercise discipline toward those who defy the truth, that the church is strong. When a church is active in spreading the gospel, aiding the needy, building up itself, that the church is strong.

Necessity of Work

The second admonition Haggai gave the people was work. What is a working church? What makes a church go to work? Just like a church that is strong, a working church is when the members of the church are working. So many measure their Christianity by the evil things they do not do. They do not lie, steal, commit adultery, etc. All this is as it should be, but that is not the whole story of being a Christian. The way some measure their Christianity a wooden Indian outside a cigar store

would qualify because it does not do evil things either. There are many things a wooden Indian does not do. In fact, the wooden Indian never does some of the things some members of the church do, such as gossip, tell dirty stories, drink alcoholic beverages and other such things.

But when the contribution is collected, the wooden Indian will not give. He never visits the sick, attends no Bible classes, teaches nobody, offers no encouraging word, not one good thing can be attributed to him. A working church is a church where members are doing good, not just refraining from evil (Titus 2:14; James 4:17).

What gets a church that is not working as it should to really start working with enthusiasm and vigor? I wish I had a “quick fix” solution. All I can suggest is a constant exposure of the need, a call for genuine devotion to the plain, narrow, unswerving uncompromised revelation of God. There must be the ceaseless emphasis on God’s love for man and man’s need of the Savior. What it means to be lost must be impressed upon saint and sinner alike. What God has done through Christ and what man must do to be saved must be the burden of our preaching. No church is what God wants it to be without these guidelines.

The leadership must be active and aggressive, determined and courageous with far-sighted vision, being out in front of the congregation leading them into spiritual activity. Every church needs a leadership that stands for the truth against all error. Leadership must present the plan of attack to be used in carrying out the work of the church that the Bible authorizes. Did you ever see a man pushing a chain down the street? The chain must be pulled from the front. And so it is with the church. I have never seen a strong and working church where it lacked a vigorous leadership.

Right Frame of Mind

A working church must have members who are willing to work. When the membership will allow this thing, that thing, anything, some other thing, to be a hindrance to the affairs of the church there is a real problem. Someone has suggested that all members of the church are willing. Ten per cent are willing to work, eighty-five per cent are willing to let them, and five percent are willing to hinder. The percentages may not be accurate but who can doubt that such groups exist? There is

such a need for members of the church to show more concern for the church and the lost. We cannot rely upon the "professional clergy" composed of self-inflated ministers with large staffs to do the work of the church. When someone else works, they are doing their work, and not your work. Nobody can do your work for you. This "let-the-other-fellow-do-it" attitude has stifled the church too often. When the walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt it was because *"the people had a mind to work."*

Weakness and lack of work prevented the erection of the temple. The people had become careless and concerned only for their own personal welfare and personal plans. They seem to have been forerunners of too many among us today in this negligence. While they were looking back on former glories and past accomplishments, viewing how things used to be, they had blazed a long trail of "do-nothing" and allowed themselves to drift off course.

God told them to be strong and work, and He would be with them. Here is the promise of divine presence and power. That alone ought allay all fears and doubts within us. Man's strength and labor standing alone is insufficient. But with God, all things are possible.

Israel could look back on the record and see how God had worked mightily for them and with them so often. There was the deliverance from Egypt, providence in the wilderness, the conquest of Canaan, even now the return from Babylon. But do we not also have their records, but even greater and more precious promises and assurances from God through Christ?

The matter reduces itself to putting first things first in life. God will be with us when we are strong and working. It is up to us to be busy doing our part. God is faithful and we can be certain He will do His part.

† † † † †

(from page 24)

What is of greatest value to you? What do you hold to be your pearl of great price? What is it which above all else ranks supreme in your existence? We must learn that all is lost which cannot be eternally saved. We brought nothing into this world and we shall carry nothing out. This whole world and all of its offerings shall terminate someday. But the soul will last somewhere forever.

† † † † †

The Women at the Tomb

Matthew 28:1-7, *"In the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keepers did quake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and behold, he goeth before you into Galilee."*

Christ had been crucified, His body buried in Joseph's tomb, the Sabbath was passed, and it was the breaking of light on the first day of the week. Certain women were coming to the tomb where Jesus was buried.

While they came there was an earthquake and God's angel descended in his dazzling appearance and rolled away the stone from the mouth of the tomb. The entrance was now opened where all could see that the place where was laid His body was empty. No longer was the body of Jesus there.

At the Tomb

When the women arrived they saw that the stone was removed and saw the angel. Luke mentions two angels. They were perplexed and afraid, bowing themselves to the earth. Their fears were increased when they noted that the body of Jesus was gone. The stress and strain of the past three days and the intense hatred they had witnessed against Jesus was sufficient to arouse their worst fears as to the disposal of His body. But their fear was abated with the words of the angel. *"Fear not ye."* He encouraged them to not be afraid. This greeting was customary of heavenly creatures as they would confront a frustrated, bewildered and frightened humanity. This was often the greeting of Jesus to His disciples. The women had come seeking the body of Christ, but, not finding it, they were

anxious. Actually, if they had found it where they supposed it would be we all could have fear.

The absence of the body from the tomb is cause for rejoicing, although these women did not so understand it just yet. The body gone is evidence that death no longer is the victor, nor does darkness and blackness await us. Fear, hopelessness and despair are removed and a joyful life beyond this one is assured for the faithful. Life does have meaning and this life is not all there is to our existence. We are not the helpless victims of the wiles of Satan and the sufferers of torment.

Is it not somewhat ironical that the absence of the body, which at first struck fear in the hearts of these women, is the first of many evidences God has given mankind of the resurrection of Christ? The empty tomb gives us courage, hope, strength and determination for victory through Christ.

Seeking Christ

The angel said, *"I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified."* There was no doubt but they were there because of their love for the Lord. They came to show honor to the Perfect One. But they did not really know Him as they ought to have known Him. Should they not have expected an empty tomb rather than a filled grave? Coming to put spices and ointment on a lifeless form had been their mission, but He was not among the dead. They sought Jesus at the wrong place. He was alive. Upon their ears fell the greatest announcement since the angels had declared the birth of Jesus nearly thirty-three or more years earlier and recorded in Luke 2:8-11. *"He is not here; he is risen; why seek the living among the dead?"* We sing the glad chorus, *"Up from the grave he arose!"*

Jesus had been sought many times prior to this. Mark 1:37, *"All men seek thee,"* Jesus was told. During His life His fame spread abroad because of His words and work, particularly His miracles of healing. Messengers were sent to Him to such an extent that He was often hindered from the preaching He came to do. Multitudes gave Him no rest.

At His birth Herod sought Him, but only to kill Him (Matthew 2). Again, John 6:24, *"When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum seeking for Jesus."* Mark 3:31,32 records the time when His family came seeking Him. The scribes, Pharisees and other enemies were constantly

seeking Him in order to take Him and dispose of Him. John 7:25, *"Is not this he, whom they seek to kill?"* In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus asked the leaders of the mob, *"Whom seek ye?"* (John 18:4). Many had sought Jesus for various and sundry reasons, some honorable and some dishonorable. These women came seeking Him out of love for the One who had blessed their lives. But they had come to the wrong place.

We, too, must seek Jesus if we please God and receive the rewards that God offers (Hebrews 11:6). We must seek Deity with diligence. But we seek a living Lord. John's book records how He is the living bread of life and the living water of life. Hebrews 7:7,25 affirms that He lives. He identifies Himself in Revelation 1:18, *"I am he that liveth, and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore."* Because He lives we can live this life with spiritual success and live eternally with God in heaven.

We Can Know

The angel invited these women to examine the tomb which was a mute witness to His resurrection. *"Come, see the place where the Lord lay."* They could know for themselves and could tell of it with confidence. Just so, we must come to know the truth of the resurrected Christ for ourselves. But how can we know, seeing we have no tomb into which we can gaze? We can know and be certain by the evidence presented to us.

Romans 1:4, *"And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."* His resurrection was not the first evidence given to prove He is the Son of God. Twice the Father had personally confessed Him as *"my beloved Son."* The signs, miracles and wonders had one prime message. Jesus is God's Son. The way He fulfilled the prophecies pertaining to the promised Messiah was additional evidence. But the resurrection was the climatic, superior, indispensable and irrefutable evidence that Jesus is the Son of God.

An empty tomb was before them. They became eye-witnesses of these things as did the apostles who later ran to the tomb. Peter said, Acts 2:32, *"This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses."* Jesus said to Thomas, who at first doubted the resurrection, John 20:27-31, *"Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God."*

Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

Had Been Prophecied

The angels reminded the women that Jesus had risen just as He said He would. Matthew 12:39,40, "*An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the hearts of the earth.*" Matthew 17:22,23, "*The Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men; and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again.*" Matthew 20:17-19, "*And Jesus was going up to Jerusalem and took the twelve disciples apart in the way, and said unto them, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him; and the third day he shall rise again.*"

The startling events of those dreadful days had been foretold, not only by Jesus, but by the prophets of old. Peter recalled, Acts 2:26,27, the prophecy of David and how it referred to Jesus and His resurrection (Acts 2:29-31). In view of the abundant forewarning, we sometimes wonder why the disciples were not more expectant of the things that occurred rather than so completely amazed by them. From our vantage point we might wonder, but they were still darkened in understanding, unable as yet to grasp the full significance of these events. Doubtless, we would have been no more alert to them.

The Difference

We should join with glad hearts with these faithful women, the apostles and others who gazed into the empty tomb as we remember the cry of the angels, "*He is not here. He is risen.*" The women left the tomb, obviously troubled and shaken by this experience, but quite different from the way they came. They

(continued page 6)

Paul's Balance Sheet

"Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more, circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death, if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." (Philippians 3:4-11). "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." (Matthew 13:45,46).

The Parable

In the parable of the pearl merchant, Christ depicts a man, probably leaving home with a bag full of gold, going to the market place where pearl sellers displayed their gems. The man sought goodly pearls. He finally found one that excelled all others. He desired it exceedingly and obviously inquired as to its price. He then gave all his gold, sold all his possessions and gladly parted with everything he had in order to lay hold on that one goodly pearl. Such is the action of one who realizes the value of the kingdom of God.

In the letter to the church at Philippi he speaks of his losses that he considered gains and his gains that he considered losses. As a business man considers his assets and liabilities, making a balance sheet to determine the state of affairs, Paul presents his "balance sheet" showing what he gave up and what he gained.

What Paul Gave Up

What did Paul give up to be a Christian? He sacrificed his religion. Notice in the Philippian text the conformity to the Jewish law that earlier characterized him. Even after he became a Christian he spoke with respect for the Mosaic Law, even though he knew that mankind was not amenable to it any longer. While he willingly gave up the old law and the Jewish faith, it was very costly to him to do so. He gave up what he formerly considered to be right.

This meant that he gave up a rich and illustrious ancestry. Paul was not only a Jew, but when he said he was “*of the stock of Israel*,” he denotes that he was a true descendant of the patriarch Jacob. He was not a proselyte from a Gentile nation, but one who had the advantages that belonged to those who were of a direct line from the venerable pillars of the Jewish nation. Paul was of real “blue blood” and aristocracy.

He was also of the tribe of Benjamin, the one tribe that remained loyal to Judah, the tribe of David. No Gentile blood was ever intermingled into his family, but he was “*a Hebrew of the Hebrews*.”

He had been trained and educated in Judaism, having knowledge of language, customs, traditions, rituals and doctrines. He was one of the best informed people in the land, having studied at the feet of the great Jewish teacher, Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). No more patriotic Jew could be found than Paul.

He gave up his religious party, the Pharisees. There was not a sect among the Jews more strict in the customs and traditions of the Jews than the Pharisees. None were more zealous for the old law, at least in word, than his party. Acts 26:5 tells us he was born a Pharisee, which means his father before him was a Pharisee. He was of that sect that considered the Jewish traditions to be observed with equal respect and reverence as the law of God.

Furthermore, his religious life dominated his existence. He considered Christianity as heresy and a threat against his faith. He carried his convictions into the arena of actions. “*As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women, committed them to prison.*” (Acts 8:3). “*And Saul, yet breathing threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were man or woman, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.*” (Acts 9:1,2). “*I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city of Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught*

according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into the prisons both men and women.” (Acts 23:3,4). “For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews’ religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it, and profited in the Jews’ religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.” (Galatians 1:13,14).

Because he was the kind of person he was in the Jewish faith, to become a Christian meant the termination of great power, prestige, wealth, reputation and stature among his own nation. When this man became a child of God through Christ, he was at the top rung of the political and religious ladder among the Jewish people.

But notice Paul’s attitude toward such things. *“Those I counted loss for Christ.”* The advantages of birth, pedigree, education, reputation, things he once valued highly, he no longer considered them as gain. He came to the point that such things were considered obstacles and hindrances to receiving that which he now deemed of so much greater value. *“I count all things but loss.”* Not only did he turn away from his former things, but whatever might arise in the future, if it was not to help him serve God through Christ, these also would be rejected. He had found *“the pearl of great price”* in Christ Jesus. *“And do count them but refuse.”* His former glories were, by comparison to serving Christ, as but trash and garbage, waste matter, worthy only of being burned up, blown away and dispelled.

What Paul Gained

While giving up all of that, what had Paul gained? Turning now to the other side of his religious ledger, Paul calls our attention to the profit side. If Paul had only given up and there had been no profit in doing so he might have announced himself spiritually bankrupt. But as Paul saw it, there had been a very valuable and profitable increase.

He said he had replaced all his cancelled gains by one single item, using but one word to define his gain; namely, Christ. *“That I may win Christ.”* To Paul, having Christ was worth infinitely more than all else that this world combined could have afforded him. We need to ask ourselves if we have this same attitude toward the Lord Jesus.

How did Paul describe having Christ? It was more than simply knowing about Christ, or even understanding His doctrine. It means to be found in Him. Being "*in Christ*" was important to Paul. This referred to a spiritual relationship that he had with God. He wrote in Second Timothy 2:10 that salvation was in Christ. In Ephesians 1:3 he said that all spiritual blessings were in Christ. In Romans 8:1 he said there was no condemnation in Christ.

Having Christ meant putting complete dependence on the righteousness of God through Christ for salvation rather than on himself, or his obedience to the old law. Paul realized that one cannot be saved by his own merit (Titus 3:3-5; Ephesians 2:8,9). Mankind must depend upon the merit of Christ to be saved. Paul knew he could benefit from the offerings of God only by coming to Christ.

Having Christ meant knowing the Lord as Savior, being in fellowship with Him, looking to Him as the redeemer, guide, teacher, protector and sustainer of life. It meant partaking of and developing the characteristics of Christ in his own personality and life. It meant to have life because of the resurrection of Christ.

It also meant, and Paul learned this over and over, that he must partake of the sufferings of Christ. Few Christians have endured as much as did Paul from the hands of the enemies of God in order to be a faithful Christian. But he knew it ultimately meant an eternal life in heaven.

Paul was a highly educated person. But to him, having this relationship with God through Christ meant excellency. By comparison, everything else paled into insignificance.

He Knew What Mattered

Jesus taught, "*What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul.*" Paul lived in true conviction to this teaching. He followed the Lord's footsteps. He did what was necessary. He paid whatever price was to be exacted. He risked whatever had to be risked. It meant friends, family, material gain, acceptance, job, possession, pleasure and even brought suffering, ridicule, pain, hardship and persecution. But such would not be allowed to interfere to cause him to refuse Christ. So it must be with us. There is nothing that we can allow to interfere in life that keeps us from being faithful to the Word of God and putting Christ first in all things.

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Another Testament?

The Mormon Church sponsors ads on television contending that the Book of Mormon is another testament of Jesus Christ. Now we have the Old Testament, New Testament, and another testament. But the last one is just another false claim by men to prop up a false religion by the claim on latter-day revelation just like the Jehovah Witness cult, Seventh Day Adventist, Christian Science, Jim Jones, Jim Bakker, Jimmy Swygart, Oral Roberts and such like. The whole bunch of them is false and contradicts the Bible.

The Mormons claim respect for the Bible but the Book of Mormon ridicules having an all-sufficient Bible as the Bible claims for itself.

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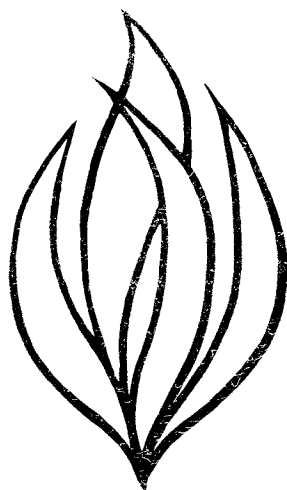


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*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*



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The Fellowship of Saints

Acts 2:42, *"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."*

There is a word found a number of times in the New Testament in the Greek that is variously translated. The word is "koinonia." It is translated "fellowship" in Acts 2:42; "contribution" in Romans 15:26; "communion" in First Corinthians 10:16; and "communicate" in Galatians 6:6. The word means a sharing in common, holding a mutual interest, mutual activity, a partnership with each other, participating together. Our text says that the church in Jerusalem continued stedfastly in this fellowship. Our lesson proposes to study what this fellowship is and what it means to those involved.

Fellowship is a well illustrated concept in the teaching that calls for unity. Saints make up the church, the body of Christ. Just as there is to be harmony and unity in the physical body, so there is to be a similar harmony and unity in the Lord's spiritual body, each member of the body functioning as it should, in fellowship and mutual interest and commonly working with every other member that works harmoniously.

First Corinthians 12:25, *"That there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another."* In Christ all the selfish, secular, artificial distinctions generally prevailing in the world among people are removed in our spiritual fellowship and brotherhood together (Galatians 3:28).

Have No Fellowship

There are some things with which the Christian is to have no participation and fellowship. First Corinthians 10:20, *"I would not that ye have fellowship with devils."* Ephesians 5:11, *"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."* Neither is there to be fellowship with unbelievers (Second Corinthians 6:14), false teachers (First Timothy 6:3-5; Second John 9-11), those who are immoral (First Corinthians 5:9-11,13) those who create division by false doctrines (Romans 16:17), or those who walk disorderly (Second Thessalonians 3:6). It is unfortunate that too many who

profess Christianity are not respectful of the prohibitions regarding fellowship revealed in Scripture.

In what are Christians to have fellowship? We are to have fellowship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as well as one another (First John 1:1-3,7). The fellowship of Christian brethren is such a strong tie because that which binds man to man is that which binds man to God when people come to God through Christ. As Jesus prayed, brethren are to be one (John 17:21). This oneness is the basis for all areas of Christian association and fellowship.

Worship

We have fellowship in worship (First Corinthians 10:16,17). Here the word is translated "*communion*". The text is speaking of the Lord's Supper, one of the items of worship under Christ. The cup is the emblem of the blood of Christ. By drinking the cup of the Lord we proclaim the Lord, expressing our attachment to Him and to each other. The bread is the emblem of His body. We commemorate His death, burial and resurrection by observing the Lord's Supper, but we also acknowledge our brotherhood with each other. It is easy to see how we have a mutual interest in this activity in which we participate together. The same is true in the other items of worship, such as singing, praying, giving and studying the Word of the Lord. It is a serious matter to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, not only because we disobey God's command, not only because we fail to commemorate the Lord Jesus, but also because we neglect fellowship with our brethren in a way that God has prescribed.

Work

We also have fellowship in working for the Lord. Christians are like laborers sent out in the Master's vineyard (Matthew 20:1). They form the corps of workers for the Lord. First Corinthians 3:9, "*For we are laborers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.*" This presents the unity and harmonious working together that is to characterize the brethren. Paul considered Apollos a co-worker with Paul planting, Apollos watering, and God giving the increase. He often spoke of other brethren as his fellow-laborers in the Lord. We have a common cause; the cause of righteousness. We work

alongside each other, supporting each other, encouraging each other, spreading the message of salvation to a lost and dying world. We busy ourselves in caring for each others physical and spiritual welfare. This because we are saints of God in fellowship one with the other. *"For we be brethren."*

Faith

We even share in our spiritual thoughts and convictions. First Corinthians 1:10, *"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."* This requires we have the same standard and measure. It means we so mold our hearts and minds that we learn to think alike, speak alike, be recognizable by our speech and attitudes and actions in our lives.

Philippians 1:27, *"Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel."* In the essentials of the faith we stand as one. Our thought, understanding, goals and convictions regarding God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, His church, the plan of salvation, the pattern of worship, heaven, hell, sin, Satan, on and on, we are in step with each other, none *"walking disorderly"* or out of step and out of line, but each with his eye on the steps of Christ and living consistently therein. Our fellowship extends into the realm of these convictions, allowing with charity differences in matters of human opinion and judgment, but demanding oneness in those things spoken by the Lord. This all is based on our steadfastness in the *"one faith."*

Caring, Bearing, Sharing

Fellowship among brethren also includes the practical realm of sharing in suffering. First Crinthians 12:26, *"And whether one member suffer, all members suffer with it."* We make up the body of Christ as individual members. We are to *"bear one another's burdens"* (Galatians 6:2). There is a mutual sympathy, compassion and care for each other. Just as with the physical body, when one member is injured or harmed, the whole body grieves . So should it be with members of the body

of Christ.

Just as we share our mutual woes and mutual burdens bear, we also share in our joys. First Corinthians 12:26 continues, "*Or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it.*" Christians will delight in the radiance of other brethren, even when that radiance surpasses their own. Christians do not consider themselves as rivals and competitors. When a brother has ten talents and succeeds, we all rejoice. If we have but one talent we do what we can with it, and all rejoice when we succeed. As brethren in the Lord, having fellowship one with another, we learn to "*rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep.*" (Romans 12:15). Is not this to be expected as a natural consequence among those in fellowship? How could we have love for each other and manifest anything differently in our lives?

Salvation

Jude speaks of our "*common salvation*" (Jude 3). We have a mutual salvation in the same hope, based on the same Savior. Because our fellowship is holy and sacred through Christ, each one partakes of the salvation along with all others who come to Him. We are otherwise like lepers, doomed to an eternal spiritual death, unclean, exiled and excluded. But having been cleansed by the blood of Christ we now share in the inclusion among God's people, being received of God and all the saved. Just as we have the same God, the same Lord, the same Spirit, the same body, the same faith, having been baptized with the same baptism, and hold the same hope, we have that which is common to all who are faithful in Christ. This is a part of Christian fellowship. In addition, we enjoy the same divine providence and shall live together in the same eternal home of heaven when this life is finished.

Association

But we also have a daily and early fellowship on earth in our association with each other. We converse together, have daily contact in various affairs of life. Our paths cross from time to time and we are made glad to be in the company of faithful brethren. Malachi 3:16, "*They that feared the Lord spake often one to another.*" This is characteristic of Christian brethren.

One of the most strengthening and encouraging by-products

of being in the assemblies together for worship is the opportunity to see, greet, talk, with those of like faith and Christian conviction. Often the times of assembly are the only times that many brethren have opportunity to be with each other because the duties of life take them into different places and they seldom see one another.

To nurture this association, helping is to “make friends of God’s children,” Christians come together for various occasions, such as eating together, even playing together; all such things that can and do contribute greatly to understanding and knowing one another. It assists in maintaining the unity of the church, strengthening the bonds of concern for each other. How can we grow in love one toward the other without some opportunity for association together? This is an activity in which individual Christians should take part, availing themselves of opportunities of such relationships. This is too often considered the only means of fellowship, however. But we have already shown a host of other areas of fellowship. But this is certainly one branch of our mutual concern, mutual participation and demonstration of mutual goals.

We Be Brethren

When we understand and appreciate fellowship of the saints as the Bible teaches, we see its warmth, beauty, brotherliness, comfort, unity and encouragement. We are in a company composed of the redeemed who are walking hand and hand and heart in heart with each other, helping each other get to heaven and serving under the leadership and guidance of Jesus Christ, our elder brother. Because of our common convictions, standing together in God’s truth, being brothers and sisters in God’s family, we have a common ambition and seek to help each other reach that ultimate reward.

The next time you sing, “Bless be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love,” consider with gratitude the provision from God for Christian fellowship in all the various areas wherein it is manifested. Seek the fellowship with the faithful and avoid fellowship with that which is prohibited and excluded. Nurture and protect fellowship with the saints and defends its sanctity, *“for we be brethren.”*

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Proverbs 6:16-19

Sin rises from ignorance, thoughtlessness, carelessness, weakness, slothfulness, lack of alertness and similar sources. But Proverbs six deals with sin that comes from one who studies to commit sin. What that person does, says and thinks is intentional and devised. Out of rebellion he commits evil deliberately and willfully.

Seven sins are mentioned in this passage that God says He hates. Hate is a strong word, but it is the one chosen by the Holy Spirit to convey the intensity of the Lord's displeasure at these things. While we learn that God hates sins, we also must learn to make the distinction between hating sin and hating the sinner. God loves the sinner and has demonstrated that love by providing His Son as the way of forgiveness, showing through Him the right way to live, warning mankind of pitfalls, and offering eternal salvation. But do not confuse God's love with God's approval. Although God loves the sinner, because of His hatred of sin He does not approve of the sinner.

"These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren." We shall now consider each of these sins.

Proud Look

The Lord hates a proud look. Such a person is one who depends on himself alone, considering himself the all-sufficient person without need for anything or anybody. He is so proud. As Paul wrote, they are the people who *"professing themselves to be wise, they became fools."* He considers himself above the rest of his fellows, arrogant, snobbish, carrying an air of self-acclaimed superiority above everyone else.

This kind of person reeks with a "big I" and a "little you" attitude. He *"thinks of himself more highly than he ought to think."* (Romans 12:3).

It is good to have a certain amount of self-confidence and self-esteem. But we must recognize our dependence on God, the guidance of His Word, that without God we are nothing,

and place our confidence in Deity, not self. Humility is not determined by appearance alone, nor by tone of voice, quietness or a pious look. But like pride, is shows itself in manners. Pride of often the great hindrance to people. Humility, the opposite of pride, is a condition of heart which God is able to judge. He is pleased with the humble spirit, but repulsed at the proud and arrogant individual.

Lying Tongue

The Lord hates a lying tongue. His extent of anger is vividly noted by the category in which He places lying. Revelation 21:8, *"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death."* A lie only serves the devil and is the basis for destruction of what is true. It is a vicious sin of the tongue (James 3:6).

A lie is a weapon of persecution. Matthew 5:10-12, *"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."* The tongue can speak the truth or lies. It ought not be used for both (James 3:10).

Shedding Innocent Blood

The Lord hates hands that shed innocent blood. This is a very comprehensive way of describing an unmerciful person. We expect those who are guilty of crimes to receive the punishment deserved. But at times even the guilty receive mercy. But the innocent deserve mercy. Failure to be merciful to the guiltless is a most unmerciful act.

Murder of innocent people, abortion, other deeds whereby the innocent are made to suffer at the hands of their offenders, is looked upon with hatred by Almighty God. Christ was a victim of people such as are described here. He did not sin, neither was guile in His mouth. He was accused, but no evil proved. Though He often spoke to people, large numbers and small, He only taught what was true, condemning the evil and doing good, always with the motive of love and the desire to be

helpful. Even so, though He was approved of God by signs, wonders and miracles, merciless hands took Him and slew Him on the cross of Calvary.

None shall see heaven except by the mercy of God (Titus 3:3-5). As God has shown us mercy, should we not show mercy to others? God showed mercy to the guilty. Shall we withhold mercy from the innocent? Again, we should not confuse God's mercy as condoning evil or approving error. But God demonstrated by provision for escape from the consequences of sin and guilt, that although man stands guilty as charged, Christ died that we might be considered innocent and not suffer the wages of sin. Since the lack of mercy is so opposite to God, little wonder He hates the unmerciful who shed innocent blood! When we reject the gospel, we reject the mercy of God.

Inventors of Evil

The Lord hates the heart that devises wicked imaginations. This refers to plotting to do evil, planning to sin, not something accidental or through weakness, but deliberate and willfull. Evil begins in the heart. Proverbs 4:23, *"Keep thy heart with diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."* Matthew 12:35, *"A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things."* Matthew 15:18,19, *"But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man."*

Rather than a heart that devises such things, the Lord pleads that we have a pure heart (Matthew 5:8), and a heart whose motives, intents and designs are free from the forces of evil. The way of God governs both the deeds of man and his heart. The heart can be pure and his deeds sometimes evil through weakness. The heart can be impure with deeds deceptively good. God wants both the heart and deed to be correct and He hates that heart that seeks wrong in preference over right.

Mischief Makers

The Lord hates feet that be swift in running to mischief. It refers to a person who delights in evil, both his evil and others. Like Romans 1:32, they are like *"those who commit evil and*

have pleasure in them that do them." They are not sorry for their sins or the sins of others. They delight in sin, seek ways to defend the practice of sin, attempt to make it acceptable, even deny sin is sin, running after that which is wrong and participating in it. We should mourn over evil and error. It should pain our hearts and disturb us that people would engage in so much of this world of evil. It ought to grieve us that the will of Almighty God, the benevolent Father of heaven, is so arrogantly and blatantly defied by mankind, realizing that those who do so shall perish in the fires of an eternal hell.

False Witnesses

The Lord hate false witnesses that speak lies. Lying has already been mentioned and condemned by God. Here we have special attention focused on false teachers. False teaching cannot produce life but only destruction. Second Peter 2:1,2, *"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of."* First John 4:1, *"Beloved, believe not every spirit but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world."* Jesus warned, Matthew 7:15, *"Beware of false prophets."*

Those who hold error in spite of the truth are rebellious and unsubmissive to the will of God. They show no love for God nor man. Often they talk the longest and loudest about love, love, love. But they know the least on that subject and practice it almost none at all. They become enemies of those who do love the truth that they refuse to follow.

Mankind is expected to bow before the will of God, unquestioning, without murmuring, without defensive maneuvers and manipulations, but more concerned for what God says and wants than what others may say or want.

Over the years one will likely encounter those who will walk in the way of truth when it is easy, popular, acceptable to those around them and relatively pleasant. But when walking in the light becomes more difficult, when it demands making decisions and taking stands that would infringe on worldly goals and ambitions, when it causes them to lose power and material gain, they will forsake truth and go their own way, do their own

things, brushing God aside. The Lord expressed His great disfavor toward such people.

Dividers

The Lord hates one who sows discord among brethren. Psalm 133:1, *"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."* This is one of almost countless passages in the Old and New Testaments that admonish, encourage, commend and command oneness, peace among brethren, unity and harmony among those in God's fellowship. To be guilty of disrupting that condition is to violate God and His will. First Corinthians 1:10, Paul warned the Corinthian brethren because of the divisions among them. Philippians 1:27 urges unity and oneness among brethren. Division is painful, destructive, weakening and will cost the loss of precious souls. Of course, there is something worse than division and that is the sacrifice of truth in order to keep peace. But even here, the cause of division is error. Error causes division. Unless everyone surrenders the truth and adopts error division will result. But woe to those that promote and cause the division and strife because they have been advocates and defenders of that which is contrary to God's truth.

What causes division among brethren? What produces peace among God's people? The first question usually is answered when we consider the teaching being done. Truth promotes unity and error divides. Often when there is division it is because somebody begins to teach false doctrines that faithful brethren cannot and will not fellowship. Also, at times, there are those who simply must have their own way in everything even where human judgment is involved and take that determination to the point of contention and division. Woe be to that person who, in personal ambition and promotion of self, causes strife and division in the ranks of the body of Christ! Some have shown themselves willing to sacrifice truth and peace among brethren in order to have their own way; have something they can "boss;" make themselves somewhat over somebody else. To have peace with such people demands peace on their terms rather than on God's terms. When the peace and unity among brethren is shattered somebody stands guilty of sin. Amos 3:3, *"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"* The standard of truth must be respected and obeyed by everyone. There must be more concern for others than for self in matters that call for

the exercise of human opinion and judgment. There must be concern for *"thus saith the Lord"* in matters where God has spoken. To be the cause and source, the focal point and promoter of strife and division among brethren in the church is to be guilty of piercing the body of Christ as surely as did the Roman soldier when Jesus was hanging on Calvary's tree. The way to promote unity is to promote truth. Those who love truth will stand united. Unity is not achieved favorable before God through compromise, negotiation, unity in diversity, agreeing to disagree, or any such things.

A serious investigation and consideration of the things that the Lord said He hates should strike fear in our heart. Let us avoid these sins and make ourselves better servants of God, promote the good and contribute substantially to reaching our ultimate and eternal goal of a home with God in heaven.

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Paul's Prayer for Colosse

Number One

Colossians 1:9-12, *"For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness, giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."*

We are not sure who established the church in Colosse. Possibly some of the disciples converted by Paul while he was in Ephesus for several years went there and preached the truth. Paul was in prison in Rome at the time that he wrote this epistle. The primary purpose of it seems to be a warning to the brethren against Judaistic teachers, Oriental philosophers, and other heretics that corrupted Christianity.

Paul evidently considered the church there a good church because he commended it in so many ways. He was thankful for

their faith, their love for the brethren, and the hope they had (1:4,5). Have you ever wondered how Paul might feel toward the congregation to which you belong?

Paul and Prayer

In verses three and nine of chapter one Paul said he prayed for these brethren. He obviously believed in the power of prayer. Christians are not fatalistic, with the attitude, "whatever will be, will be." Christians believe that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much (James 5:16). The word "effectual" means adequate.

Paul practiced prayer. In Acts 20:36, *"And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all."* Second Corinthians 13:7, *"Now I pray to God that ye do no evil..."* Again, Philippians 1:9, *"And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment."*

Not only did Paul practice prayer, believing in the power of prayer, he taught others to pray. *"Pray without ceasing."* (First Thessalonians 5:17). *"I desire that men pray in every place."* (First Timothy 2:8). *"I exhort that prayers be made..."* (First Timothy 2:1). Prayer was a part of Paul's life.

The prayer we have under consideration was an intercessory prayer, which means it was a prayer on behalf of another. *"We pray always for you."* (Second Thessalonians 1:11). Paul urged others to pray for him. Second Thessalonians 3:1, *"Finally, brethren, pray for us."* We ought to pray for each other, our nation's leaders, the sick, those who are lost, the bereaved and the saved. Too often mankind tries to fight his battles in this life all alone when God is ready and willing to give aid in time of need. Do not deprive yourself of the blessing of prayer.

Knowledge

Paul prayed here that his Colossian brethren would be *"filled with knowledge of his will with all spiritual wisdom and understanding."* To be filled is not difficult to understand. We drive into a gasoline station and tell the attendant to "fill 'er up." If we then get only a dime's worth of gasoline, we know we are not going very far. Nor will people get very far spiritually on a dime's worth of knowledge of God's will. We need to "fill 'er up." Is not this the way to really go places?

Possibly too many of us are contented with little knowledge.

We have noted over the years that many are ignorant and seemingly prefer to remain so, judging by the effort and interest they put forth to expand their knowledge. But Paul prayed that these brethren abound in knowledge. The church of Christ was once known among all religious people as a people who knew the Bible. But we would not suggest that this is necessarily our reputation now.

In the world the ignorance of the Bible is appalling. We recall that a few years ago on a question and answer program over the radio that sometimes one category of questions was the Bible. We seldom hear of such a thing anymore. But we were delighted when someone selected that category because it gave us an opportunity to test ourselves as well. I suppose the reason the category is so seldom mentioned anymore is because people lack interest and knowledge of the Bible.

A story is told about the time the contestant was asked to identify Dan and Beersheba. One "bright" student responded that they were husband and wife like Sodom and Gomorrah. Possibly some who are reading this will not see the humor in it because they do not know enough of the Bible to know that all four names are names of cities.

Lack of knowledge is not due to lack of intelligence or ability. People know how to earn a living, details on world affairs, ball scores and names of athletes, movie stars, even the sordid facts of depraved lives. Possibly some who claim to be Christians know more about the "soaps" on television than they do the Sermon on the Mount. (I have often wondered why they were called "soaps." Do you supposed it is because they need cleaning up.) Could you even teach a person the simple plan of salvation if they asked you how to be saved? Why do people know other things but not the Bible? It is because they put their minds on other things rather than the will of God.

Are We Hungry?

Matthew 5:6, *"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled."* Many have no appetite for the spiritual bread of life. They do not read good religious literature, even though they devour the daily newspaper. They will read magazines with all kinds of sinful episodes revealed, but never a good book on Biblical inspiration, church history, Bible characters or Bible geography. While they read the obituary column and the funny papers, along with the

sports page, they cannot find time to be a daily Bible reader. We want to take the Bible like capsules, not like daily food necessary to sustenance. We want one dose to last us all week when we ought to be like the Bereans who searched the Scriptures daily (Acts 17:11).

It is really not too difficult to tell why some go off on extreme tangents, hobbies, philosophies and evil ways. They are ignorant and seem to like it that way. Even many are zealous, but without knowledge, like the Jews of whom Paul wrote in Romans 10:2.

The church in Colosse might put many congregations today to shame as far as fruit bearing, increasing, possessing faith, hope and love. Yet, Paul says there was room for growth and he wanted them to be filled. To be filled takes time, work, study, sacrifice and personal effort. How many are willing to invest in Biblical knowledge like that? You have heard of the hen and pig viewing a sign picturing a breakfast of ham and eggs. The pig commented to the hen that the production of an egg was just a day's work for her, but to produce his part of the picture meant a personal sacrifice. This is what it takes to ever be filled with knowledge of the will of God.

Know His Will

Paul stressed that we know the Father's will. There are many things we can come to know, even many religious ideas and doctrines. But we must know God's will, book, chapter and verse, *"thus saith the Lord,"* and learn to *"speak as the oracles of God."* (First Peter 4:11).

Do you suppose too many of us are willing to have knowledge "by proxy?" Are we willing to let the preacher know, or some elder, or someone else, but never feel the need or duty to know for ourselves?

A young man or woman may become valedictorian of the class, summa cum laude, attain the highest academic honors, but not know the Bible, live the life of a fool, and die going headlong into hell. A person may be an authority in his line of work or profession, but without the knowledge of the Father's will he is sorely lacking in what really matters.

The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). We are saved by the gospel (First Corinthians 15:1,2). The word is that by which our souls are purified (First Peter 1:22). The truth makes us free (John 8:32). God's Word keeps us from sinning (Psalm 119:11). Nothing else guides us like the

Word of God (Psalm 119:105). God's will is what Paul said we need and we need to be filled with it.

Understanding and Wisdom

Furthermore, we need spiritual understanding and wisdom. There is a line of difference between knowledge and wisdom. We may possess certain factual information but lack wisdom to properly use it. There is a difference between a wise man and a foolish man (Matthew 7:24-27). In that passage both men had knowledge, but only one had wisdom. James 4:17 teaches that one may know, but not act on what he knows, and sins. James 1:6, *"If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him."* Wisdom comes by application of Scripture (Second Timothy 3:14,15). The Scripture teaches not only WHAT but also HOW TO USE THE WHAT. Knowing God's will is essential, but by itself is insufficient until wisdom puts that knowledge into obedient action.

If you have read intently, possibly you have learned something you did not know heretofore, or maybe you have been reminded of previous knowledge. But the question before you is, "What do you intend to do with Paul's instructions?" Do you think he would pray for us the same way he did for the church in Colosse? Surely he would.

God wants us to be filled with something, brethren. What is it according to Paul's prayer? It is knowledge. What knowledge must we have? We must have knowledge of God's will? To what extent are we to have this knowledge? It must be to the extent that we be wise by applying it. Just how do you suppose we get started in this direction? When do you plan to start studying?

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The Next Issue

It is planned that the next issue of **A Burning Fire** will be devoted mostly to matters about the church, its organization, number, name, builder, foundation and when and where it began.

Paul's Prayer for Colosse

Number Two

We refer you to the text given in the first lesson, Colossians 1:9-12, and the prayer recorded there that was prayed by Paul for his brethren in the church in Colosse. Having considered the first part of that prayer in that earlier lesson, we have learned that there was much good in that congregation and Paul commended them for that good. But he also warned against the false and vain philosophies that were being taught to which they might become subjected and overturned. He showed them, even though they had strengths, that there was room for growth, and urged them to move forward. He prayed that they would be *"filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."* He also prayed, *"that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing."* This last phrase now commands our attention.

The Walk

The term "walk" is often used in Scripture to speak of one's manner of daily living. Psalm 1:1, *"Blessed is the man that*



"Buck," my good dog, is watching over my cabin that I use for my office, study, library and where I produce from start to finish, ***A Burning Fire.***

walketh not...” in certain paths of life. The Christian life is called a walk in First John 1:7. Enoch, Noah and others are said to have walked with God. They lived righteous and godly lives, allowing God’s will to direct their steps. When we sing the song, “When we walk with the Lord,” we have reference to the same idea, that pertaining to daily life before God and with Him.

Paul uses the term “walk” to admonish Christian living. Notice a few instances. “*Let us walk honestly as in the day.*” (Romans 13:13). “*This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh.*” (Galatians 5:16). “*And walk in love...*” (Ephesians 5:2). “*Walk as children of light.*” (Ephesians 5:8). “*Let us walk by the same rule.*” (Philippians 3:16). “*As ye therefore received Christ, so walk in Him.*” (Colossians 2:6). The word refers to the way to live life.

Paul prayed that these brethren would walk a certain way which he calls “*worthy.*” This refers to their manner of life being consistent to what the Lord is to us, what He wants from us, what He has done for us. First John 1:7, “*If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*”

Peter also wrote, First Peter 2:21, “*For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.*” This tells us the way we are to walk. We are to live like Christ. Ephesians 4:1, “*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.*” If we profess to be Christians we are expected to imitate Christ. This kind of living results from knowledge and the practice of wisdom.

Whom to Please

Notice Paul included, “*...unto all pleasing.*” This does not mean we are to strive to please everybody, but that we are to strive to please God in everything. “*Wherefore we labor that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.*” (Second Corinthians 5:9). Pleasing God is the goal. With the word “*all*” we have a second emphasis in this prayer on the wholeness, completeness and fulness of our service to God. Be filled with knowledge and be pleasing in all things to the Lord. The Lord wants the whole man, all of the time. Partial, on-and-off Christianity is not acceptable to Deity. While we might content ourselves with being pleasing in some things, sometimes, God wants us to give the one hundred per cent

service in our lives.

This is reasonable expectation, seeing what God has done for us. We expect this in most other matters, even secular and mundane things. If the lady of the house cleans the house, prepares the meals, cleans the clothes, performs tasks that are not the most exciting in life, there should be a good consistency in that work. Suppose a meal is prepared and the biscuits are good, but the meat is burnt, the coffee lukewarm, the desert fair. Would we recommend that as a first class dinner? We can expect better, even though we overlook such things because they really do not matter that much. But in matters of service to God all things are important. Being right in one area does not give us license to ignore God's will somewhere else. Being a daily Bible reader does not dismiss our duty to assemble on Wednesday evening, if such is the time of meeting for study. Earning a livelihood for the family does not mean we can curse, swear and other such things. Honesty in business does not mean we can forget about prayer, visitation or other work. Being good to the family is right and commendable, but does that remove all responsibility in the other areas of Christian living? You even expect more than that from your automobile. Would you want a car that only had a good motor, but no brakes; good seats, but no lights. James 2:10, *"For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."* This does not mean if one lies he is also guilty of fornication. It means if he lies, or whatever violation he commits, he is a violator of God's law and shall be held accountable.

We realize that we are human beings with frailties and weaknesses, often stumbling and sinning. While we cannot be perfectly sinless, what excuse is there for us to strive for anything less? Whoever said living a Christian life was easy anyway? It is a challenge, a fight, a struggle, and a constant uphill battle against forces that would destroy us. But the victory belongs to those who are faithful in the Lord.

Prevention

What Paul was trying to do for these brethren in Colosse was to prevent their shame, disgrace and avoid spiritual harm that could come upon them. He knew how hypocrisy, saying one thing but doing another, hurts and injures everyone. He, like Peter in Second Peter 2:2, when writing about false teachers, *"by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of,"*

would bring them to naught unless they were alert and aggressive. He knew, like he wrote in Titus 2:5 concerning the misbehavior of some women, that their conduct would bring reproach on the whole cause of Christ.

When Christians are like the world, the church is wounded, the truth discounted and souls misled. If a man who is not a Christian gets drunk, this is sinful and shameful. But how much worse when a man who professes to follow Christ does such a thing. Evil and sinful activities, like dancing, smoking, drinking alcoholic beverages, profanity, loving money, gambling, all forms of immorality, when practiced by brethren and sisters in the church, everything decent for which they say they stand is brought low. One of the gravest problems facing the church today is not that the church is in the world, but that too much of the world is in the church. Paul prayed that these Colossian Christians would make living like Christ a full-time job.

Bearing Fruit

Paul also prayed that they would be *“fruitful in every good work.”* One who does not bear good fruit is either a bad branch or a barren tree. In Matthew twenty-one Jesus cursed the barren fruit tree because it did not produce as it ought, and thereby, He taught us a lesson. John 15:1-8 teaches that a branch that is unfruitful shall be cast off and burned.

Bearing fruit means producing good, doing good, being good, the positive side of Christianity. It includes winning souls, faithful worship, living honorably before all, doing your duty to family, being truthful, and on and on. Have you ever heard somebody described as a Christian and they said he never cursed, nor drank beer, lied, murdered, etc.? But a fence post has those qualities. What good a person does also counts. That must be taken into consideration as a mark of a Christian.

Long ago most of us have been taught that the best way to avoid evil is to be busy doing good. A mind filled with good things has no room for evil things. So it is with one's life. The person who does not do wrong does well, as far as he goes, but he has not gone far enough until he does good.

Most preachers have been told at one time or another that “you cannot tell people not to do certain things.” But the Lord did just that. But He did not stop there. He tells people what to do instead of doing the evil things.

Increased Knowledge

Paul prayed for *"increasing in the knowledge of God."* This is not exactly the same as that for which he prayed in verse nine. He was not just repeating himself. We need to have the knowledge of God's will, but we also need to know Him as our spiritual Father, which can only be attained through faithful obedience to His will. Paul once wrote, *"I know whom I have believed..."* (Second Timothy 1:12). He did not just know about God, HE KNEW GOD.

Christ, as Shepherd, knew His sheep and we, His sheep, can know the Shepherd. This implies a closeness, familiarity, oneness, kinship.

I like the story of two men who were asked to read Psalm twenty-three before an audience. It illustrates the point I seek to make. A great actor read the Psalm with great diction, voice inflection, clear and distinct, and the audience listened intently, bursting into applause when he finished. An old Christian also read the Psalm. His voice cracked at times, but with reverence, quietness and awe he spoke the words. The audience, when he finished, stood silent, some even with tears in their eyes. When asked to explain the difference in the reactions, someone responded, "The actor knew the Psalm, but the Christian knows the Shepherd." This is the kind of knowledge Paul wanted for his brethren. John's words are appropriate. First John 2:3, *"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments."* This knowledge comes from being filled with the knowledge of His will, walking worthily, bearing fruit, uphill, downhill, good times, bad times, all the time, through thick and thin, living life as God has taught us to live it.

Strength

Paul prayed that his brethren be *"strengthened with all might."* He placed no limit on how strong they could get. Can one ever become too strong spiritually? Can anybody be too faithful? Is it possible to do too much good? The strength for which Paul prayed was *"according to his glorious power;"* that is, to the extent of God's power. This is an impressive way of urging that they be strong to their fullest capacity. How could anyone ever conclude they need no more study, no more work, can miss worship, have done enough. One sure sign of growing weakness is to think that we are strong enough. *"Let him that*

thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (First Corinthians 10:12). What a marvelous goal Paul sets before us!

We all have observed those men and women who are such fine, admirable pillars of truth with Christlike characters. Let us know that they did not become that way easily and overnight. They gradually grew to such a state of spiritual strength and nobility. Such character comes from feeding on the Word of God and applying God's will in daily life. The character we admire in others, that reflects the beauty of Christ, can also be our character. Let us all pray for ourselves and others the same prayer Paul prayed for these Christians in Colosse.

† † † † †

The Good Samaritan

The text is familiar to the Bible student and is rather lengthy to include here. If you will, please refresh your mind with the record in Luke 10:25-37 and then proceed with this study.

Never was the divine sincerity of Jesus Christ more evident than when He dared to tell this story and teach the lessons contained in it. He was teaching at a time when His own race hated Him because He had exposed their hypocrisies, self-righteousness and racially prejudiced spirit. Teaching this lesson, like several others, contributed significantly to His death because it was so offensive to His hearers and did not flatter their self-centered egos as they had become accustomed to hearing from their own teachers. They failed to realize that Jesus told them the truth that could free them from their own narrowness, bigotry, complacency and sinfulness. The truth He taught makes one free and leads those who conform to it into lives of great usefulness and joy, both here and in eternity.

The story was told in answer to a question posed to Him from a lawyer. *"What shall I do to inherit eternal life?"* This is a great question and deserving of an answer. There is nothing in the question itself to suggest trickery or that would reveal the sinister motives for asking it. But Jesus tells the story and allows the questioner to discover the true answer for himself, seeing that the man knew the law. *"What is written in the law? How readest thou?"* Herein lies the answer to the inquiry given to Jesus. We could paraphrase His answer by saying, "What does the Bible

teach?" This is where we get our answers.

The lawyer answered, *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself."* Jesus commended his remark and admonished the lawyer to be obedient to that teaching.

The Real Issue

It was not a matter of knowing what was right with this man, but the question that was really pending was whether he would submit to the truth he knew. He sought a way to escape obligation that the law imposed upon him. He was willing to justify himself. He asked, *"Who is my neighbor?"* Yes, he knew right from wrong. He knew his duty. He wanted to dodge it. This provoked the story that Jesus told that illustrates the great truth regarding love for God and neighbor.

The man who fell by the side of the road was a victim of human lust, greed and abuse of power. He was attacked by thieves, robbed, beaten and left to die as a result of inhumane treatment. But there is something more tragic than physical and material loss. Spiritual injury and the loss of the soul because of sin is far worse. Our spiritual destruction is more self-imposed than was the suffering incurred by this man on the road to Jericho. Though there may be many influences that tempt us to sin, in the final analysis, we enter into sin because we choose to sin ourselves.

There is much in the world that survives and thrives by feeding on the works of the flesh. There are many in the world who would make your physical and spiritual welfare their prey for their own selfish and personal benefit and earthly profit. But this victim is a symbol of all human suffering, representing all who are in need in one way or another. Many are hopeless, helpless, totally dependent on the mercy of others. They have been victimized and mistreated, whether by others or through their own evil, and left to die.

Broken Reeds

By coincidence, and what would at first seem to be a turn of good fortune for the victim, a priest came that same way where the man was lying. Surely a religious leader, who was to be an example for others, one who had knowledge of the law and

knew his duty, surely he would hasten to offer help to the sufferer. But the priest saw the man and refused to help, passing by on the other side as if the victim was not there or was totally unnoticed. How could he do this? He saw the plight of the man. But sometimes people are not so quick to help others because they have never developed compassion, sympathy or an understanding of the poverty, hunger, suffering and despair that are everyday circumstances for many people. These conditions are admittedly unpleasant, disturbing, soul-shaking, but they exist and many of us are so heartless that we ignore them.

The priest was obviously hardened, insensitive and indifferent to the problem of human suffering. But our Lord was not that way. Even in the Old Testament, when people were evil, religious but not righteous, the Lord told them, *"I desire mercy, not sacrifice."* Sacrifice is essential and worship indispensable, but it is vain unless accompanied by a righteous life, a spirit of helpfulness, mercy, benevolence and love for others. The same thought is found in James 1:27, *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."* This is a definition of pure religion. We cannot have a pure religion without a benevolent attitude and action. This priest never learned that. How well have we learned it today? We are so often concerned about form, ritual, some of which is important, concerned about position among men, opinions and traditions which are not that important, that the weightier matters of the will of God, judgment, mercy and faith are neglected. We seldom find a picture of a more contemptible person than this priest whose religion was all word without good work that God expected of His people.

But another man also came that way somewhat later. He was a Levite, a servant in the temple and worship. He, like the priest, was a prominent religious person. But there was no difference in their reactions toward the needy. He saw the victim and followed the first man, passing by on the other side.

Doubtless, both of them, if asked, could have offered excuses for themselves. Most who refuse to do their duty are good at justifying themselves. But the facts remained, and it cannot be brushed aside, they had the opportunity to help and they did not care enough to help, did nothing, and went on their way without concern for the fallen man.

A Different Attitude

The Samaritan arrived on the scene and looked on the situation differently. He saw the man, went to him, bound up his wounds, provided for him the best he could, nursed him, took him to shelter, provided for him further to the extent of his ability even after he had to continue his journey. The priest and Levite might condemn the Samaritan as a sinner and a “dog,” but it is easy to see who was the better person. The Samaritan may not have been among the chosen Jewish race, but the Lord approved what the Samaritan did more than He approved what the priest and Levite did not do. It might be well that we asked ourselves at this point which of the three we would rather be when the day of judgment arrives?

But why did the Samaritan help this man? He encountered all of the fearful circumstances surrounding the scene as did the others. He might have offered some excuses. But he helped because he had compassion on him. His compassion would not allow him to dodge his responsibility. He had a good heart, a clean conscience, convictions that would force him to take advantage of this opportunity to do good. He could not afford to let it be handled any other way. James would tell us, in light of James 2, that this Samaritan's faith led him to work. His religion was not so bounded by human creeds, personal ambitions, legalistic ideas and traditions of prejudice that he could not aid those who needed assistance, whether they were his own people or not. What a lesson there is for us today!

Lessons for Us

There is no doubt as to who was the good neighbor. There is no question as to whom Jesus is upholding in this story. The lessons of the parable are explicit and numerous. We see the vanity of a religion that cannot help those who are in need, regardless of who they are. We see the hypocrisy of a faith without compassion and sympathy toward the less fortunate. We see the evil of selfishness and unconcern for our fellowman. We see the emptiness of excuses and the blackness of such legalistic and prejudicial attitudes that would prevent benevolent action. We see the religion that Christ taught includes a benevolent attitude and action toward the poor and needy whoever and wherever they may be, to the extent of our opportunity and ability. There is something basically anti-Christ about a person, church, idea or doctrine that would prevent God's people from demonstrating compassion and service when

(from page 24) it is needed.

How often our generation is content to pass by on the other side. We spare ourselves, disguise our selfishness under excuses. We are too busy to get involved. We may not be able to help everybody, therefore some of us do not help anybody. We deceive ourselves, but not God.

When we pass by on the other side we sin against the needy; rob ourselves of one of life's most enriching experiences; and show an unconcern for what God would have us do and be. Helping somebody else is a way of helping ourselves.

God Did Not Pass By

What is God, Christ and the Holy Spirit had looked upon mankind, victimized by his own sins, and passed by on the other side? Where would be our hope? How would we ever reach heaven or escape hell? Are we so ungrateful for what God has done for us that we cannot show mercy and compassion toward others? Shall we not "go and do likewise?" Would not the world be better if we would ?

We see the Lord's will in this record and the words of James falls heavily on our hearts. "*To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*" (James 4:17).

* * * * *

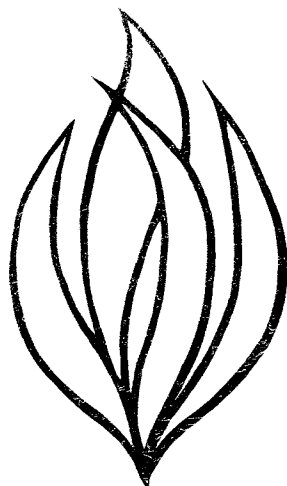
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A Burning Fire



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



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The Church: Organization

We live in a day when many are much opposed to what they call organized religion. Inasmuch as the Lord's church is organized, their hatred extends to the church and those who are members of it. It would seem that all would recognize that any group, religious, social, political or whatever, must have some form of organization and governmental control in order to exist.

There are many religious organizations in the world and many of them have brought such reproach against religion that everything religious has become their target for destruction. But the Lord's church is organized. Why are we organized as we are rather than the way other religious bodies are organized? Why do we differ from them?

The more we know about the church the better able we shall be to restore the Lord's church of the first century in our own time. The Lord established the church and it has been set in order according to His authority. People have not always adhered to the Lord's way. One of the great digressions from truth is in the area of the organization and governmental structure of the church. Throughout history men have taken it upon themselves to devise various church governments, changing, "improving," altering, restructuring God's plan. History has produced synods, councils, general assemblies, conferences, conventions and all kinds of systems by which men have chosen to regulate and control religious bodies.

But what does the Scripture teach regarding the church of Christ? Did God ordain a certain system? Or did He leave it to man to decide and devise whatever system man chose?

Monarchy

The government of the church, according to the Bible, is properly called a monarchy. It is ruled by a single person, the one all-powerful head who has all authority and absolute power. He is a King. This person is Jesus Christ. (Matthew 28:18; Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22,23). Christ does not and will not relinquish "*all rule and all authority and power*" (First Corinthians 15:24) until He comes again and delivers the

kingdom to the Father.

The church is not a democracy and is not to be governed by majority rule. Men do not determine such things by vote or conference. Mankind has not been granted the right to legislate rule and regulations, doctrine or practice, for the church. Any attempt by anyone to assume such power is to usurp the authority of the head, Jesus Christ.

Delegated Authority

Did not the apostles make rules for the church? They revealed the rules that Deity has established, but they did not make them of their own accord. They used the keys of the kingdom to make known what the Holy Spirit informed them to reveal. Even then, they revealed not by their own authority, but by the authority delegated to them by Christ. He promised them that power and work (John 14:26; 16:13,14; Galatians 1:11,12). This right and power of revelation has never been granted to any but inspired men. It is not in the inspired Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). The early Christians continued in the "*apostles' doctrine*" in the sense that they continued in what the apostles taught as they were guided by the Holy Spirit what to teach and reveal as the will of God through Christ.

Does the church not have a right to make laws for itself? Other organizations do. But there is no place in Scripture that allows the church to make or revise divine law. It has the duty to be the "*pillar and ground of the truth*" but not the inventor and instigator of "truth." The power of the church to legislate is an anti-Biblical notion many have adopted.

What about what is called the Jerusalem Conference? Did not the church legislate on that occasion? No, it did not. Brethren came together, and under the guidance of inspired men as the Holy Spirit directed, they recognized truth they had not recognized heretofore, but they did not bring that truth into being at that time, nor did they do anything other than to insist that everyone accept the truth that God has already revealed. Paul declared what God had done. James said what was done seemed good to the Holy Spirit. The prophets of God had already foretold the inclusion of Gentiles as well as Jews into the faith of Christ. Christ had already been preached to people other than Jews. That gathering did not invent or legislate truth, but submitted to truth. There was never any need for revising, up-dating, or in any way tampering with the revelation God has

given us on any subject. Man is prohibited from doing this (Galatians 1:6-9; 2 John 9-11).

The Head and the Local Church

Christ is the head of the church, and after Him the words taught by His apostles according to His authority. The first organic unit after that is the local congregation. There is not a word in the Bible authorizing any super-ecclesiastical body to govern the church that is larger than or superior to the local church. This must be accepted, not because of personal preference, but because this is the pattern Scripture authorizes. This means that every local congregation is autonomous, self-governing, under Christ. Each is free and independent from other congregations to operate and manage its affairs and do its work without direction or interference from other congregations or some super body.

Congregations may choose to cooperate and help each other, advise and counsel together, but always as equals, never with one assuming control or authority over another. Attempts to set up authoritative and governing organizations to dictate or supervise the churches is a violation of the New Testament pattern.

At the same time, this autonomous state is not to be considered as a license for local churches to teach and practice whatever they wish that is outside of the body of truth and then expect no comment or criticism from other brethren. Independence was never intended to provide a shield for error. Some have thought, because congregations are autonomous, that no matter what they say or do it is nobody's business but their own. This is a glaring error and an abuse of the divine government. The battle between truth and error is everybody's business, anywhere, anytime.

Local Structure

How is the local congregation to be governed? Again, we remind ourselves that everything must be done "*in the name of*" Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17), which means by His authority. The early congregations were overseen by men who possessed certain revealed qualifications (First Timothy 3; Titus 1). The apostle Paul ordained elders in every church (Acts 14:23). These overseers are called elders, bishops, pastors, shepherds,

presbyters or overseers. They always exist in the plurality, each congregation having more than one to supervise the work and affairs of the local church. There is to be no one-man-rule in any congregation. For the preacher to operate according to some kind of one-man "pastor system" is not Biblical.

The church in Ephesus had elders (Acts 20). First Peter 5 called the elders, shepherds, pastors, literally feeders of the flock. These identifications convey the multi-nature of the work.

The duties of these man are taught in Acts 20:28, 35; Titus 1:9; First Thessalonians 5:12,13; James 5:14; Hebrews 13:17; and First Peter 5:2,3. They are to take heed unto themselves and the flock, feed the church spiritually, help the weak, exhort in sound doctrine, convict the gainsayer, admonish the disorderly, encourage the fainthearted, be longsuffering to all, exercise oversight, not lording it over the flock, visit the sick, watch in behalf of the souls of the members of that local church, rule the church and see that the mission of the church is performed by the authority of Christ and under their supervision.

These are God-appointed duties, a delegated work. They cannot make, alter, nor revise God's rules, but are to see that God's ways are followed. In matters that call for human judgments, they have the authority and responsibility to make the choices on behalf of the congregation.

Deacons

Another group of special servants of the local church are deacons. The word "deacon" means a servant or minister. Again, there are specific qualities a man must possess before being appointed to this office or work. Their duties are not as specific as those revealed for elders, but they are servants for the church, operating under the oversight of the eldership as do all members of the local congregation.

A female deacon, a deaconness, that refers to a permanent office in the church that is a female counterpart to a deacon, is not taught in Scripture. That women could, did and should serve is not disputed. That they can violate the limitations God has placed on women leading in the church is absurd, but often violated nonetheless. Therefore, they cannot serve as elders or deacons in the church.

Unlike many religious organizations, the governmental structure of the Lord's church is relatively simple. It does not

give place to human ambitions of glory, honor, titles, positions and superiority when the work is rightly considered and properly executed. If and when people are content with God's order, the work God gave the church to do is done efficiently and Biblically. Only when people think they can "improve" on God's pattern to the problems often experienced in church affairs arise to the surface.

Place of the Preacher

Since many religious bodies give authority to their preachers (calling them pastors, a term the Bible uses for the elders or overseers), it is worth our investigation to note the place of the preacher in a local church. There is no reason that only one man be "the" preacher. Many brethren can and do preach. But usually one man does most of it. He is a preacher, having no more authority to oversee the church than any other person of the church. He has the authority to preach the word (Second Timothy 4:2), but he neither has the authority to operate the church, nor should he be called upon to do so. Too many elderships want the preacher to do their work while the elders do the work of deacons and the deacons given very little to do, and many members doing nothing at all. This is not what God intended nor designed.

If it were not for the practice of many turning such power into the hands of preachers, or preachers seizing this power for themselves, these comments would be unnecessary. It is the fault of many preachers to attempt to dominate the affairs of the church, run the church, and manipulate others for his own purposes. When he does this he is outside his realm of work. But neither is he to be looked upon as just "hired help" and be treated by the eldership and members in ways they would treat no other member. The abuse many preachers suffer at the hands of his brethren is something every preacher of many years knows first-hand, unless he has been exceptionally fortunate. Sometimes he avoids any abuse by simply compromising the truth he should preach in order to stay in peace with brethren. This is a contemptible excuse for a preacher.

Preachers and all members of the church need to be warned against those false teachers who, for reasons of promoting innovations and false ways, have attempted to remove authority from elderships. Only in that way can some of their seminary, college-trained, professional clergymen get hold of the church

and promote their error. The preacher is in an influential place. He is expected to be as influential as he can be. His advice and counsel is usually worth hearing. But he has no more authority than any other simply by virtue of being a preacher, except to preach the word with all authority of Christ behind him.

Lest We Forget

Keeping these matters before us, these issues of major concern in the effort of restoring New Testament Christianity in our own age, will prevent us from digressing from the divine pattern. While we are aware that some deny the New Testament is our blueprint, we contend such positions only further the advance of apostasy and the design of some to rule their own way. As to the kind of government the Lord's church is to have is determined by asking, "What does the Bible teach and authorize?" Once God has spoken that settles it, and we ought to believe it and follow it.

† † † † †

The Church: Name and Number

This lesson is familiar to the faithful Bible student but must be taught to all the world. Many do not know these things and many who know them do not respect them. Familiarity in no way minimizes the importance of repetition of basic truth. Departure from the truth is made possible when fundamental matters are taken for granted and are not studied and taught consistently and repeatedly. Information concerning the Lord's church is often so distorted and misrepresented that it is not too much to say that God's church is the misunderstood church.

We are aware that there now exists many churches in the world, literally hundreds upon hundreds. They vary in name, doctrine, faith, practice, message and in a multitude of lesser ways. They have similarities, but are divided one from another by major differences. Denominationalism is the prominent characteristic of what is called "Christendom" today, with its

mass of chaotic confusion, division and contradiction which is in evidence because of the existence of so many churches.

Sometimes people are inclined to accept something as true and acceptable simply because it has been that way a long time. We are glad that medical science has not been deceived that way or we would still be ignorantly "bleeding" people to treat high blood pressure. The age of things in religion does not necessarily prove it right or wrong by itself any more than does size, power, finances or degree of acceptance. Time has aided in the development of attitudes such as one church being as good as another; that it does not matter to which church one belongs; that the various churches are but branches of the Lord's church; that God accepts the existence of many churches; that names are unimportant. But all such thinking is contradictory to Biblical revelation.

One major problem among religious people trying to come to a knowledge of the truth is the desire to make God fit what exists rather than changing what exists to fit God. Are we trying to convert God to men, or men to God? We should be interested only in what the Bible teaches and be content therewith, seeing it claims all-sufficiency. This lesson shall show that the Bible teaches there is one church and find how Scripture identifies it.

Singular

Matthew 16:18, "*...upon this rock I will build my church.*" These are the words of Jesus. Notice the word used, church, which is singular in number. He did not promise to build many varying churches.

Ephesians 1:22,23, "*And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*" The church is the body of Christ.

Colossians 1:18, "*And he is the head of the body, the church...*" Ephesians 4:4, "*There is one body.*" First Corinthians 12:20, "*But now are there many members, but one body.*" As surely as there is one body with one head there is one church. All of these passages harmonize in that central theme. How can anyone honestly read the Scriptures and conclude otherwise?

John 10:16, "*...and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.*" We have no problem recognizing there is one

shepherd, who is Christ. Why do people have a problem recognizing there is one fold? If there is more than one fold, would not this allow for more than one shepherd?

The church is presented in the Bible as the family of God. First Timothy 3:15, "*...the house of God, which is the church of the living God...*" The term "*house*" refers to God's household or family, just as it does in Acts ten and Acts sixteen with reference to the family of Cornelius or the family of the jailor. In giving qualifications for elders Paul wrote in First Timothy 1:3, "*...one that ruleth well his own house,*" having reference to his own family. The Lord has a house, which is a spiritual family of brothers and sisters in Christ. It is the church and always spoken of in this sense in the singular.

Who Are The Branches?

"But the various churches are branches of the one church," some are heard to contend. If that be true the burden of proof rests on those who so contend. They have a problem with the verses teaching oneness we have quoted. We ask, "Where is Scripture to teach such a position?" If this is true it makes unity unnecessary even though the Lord prayed for unity and Paul condemned division. It might end a lot of religious strife because then everybody would agree that it makes no difference what you teach, practice or believe. Is the unity taught in the Bible nothing but an agreement to disagree, unity in diversity, each going his own way with equal authority, benefit and approval? If so, wherein does that differ from division? Nobody desires unity and oneness more than faithful Christians. But dare we attempt to have "unity" at the sacrifice of truth?

The only passage to my knowledge that any have ever attempted to use to find Biblical support for the divisions of denominationalism and that many churches are merely branches of the Lord's church is John 15:1-6 where the branches are specifically identified as people rather than denominations. Denominations have no Biblical authority for their existence. Where is the passage? Jesus said, "*If a man abide not in me...*" Nothing even suggests He speaks of various and differing churches; certainly not denominations that did not exist until nearly six hundred years after the Lord's church came into existence on Pentecost.

The apostles and early avangelists wrestled with many problems in the early church, and while division was one of

them, this thing of denominationalism was not present. They simply did not exist, but the Lord's church did. Therefore I know that the Lord's church is not composed of many different denominations.

It is reasonable to think that the same vine could produce grapes, pumpkins, oranges, apples, watermelons and bananas at the same time? It is equally unreasonable to think Christ is the founder of all the contradicting denominational bodies.

One Church

The conclusion is inescapable if you teach and believe the Bible. There is one church. Any church that contends for more than one church cannot be teaching the truth regarding the church. Those who contend for one church are teaching what the Bible affirms.

When the Bible does speak of a plurality of churches it uses the word in the sense of local congregations, local churches. Romans 16:16 is an example, "*The churches of Christ salute you.*" Revelation 1:4-7 is another, "*...the seven churches which are in Asia.*" Also we read in Galatians 1:2, "*...churches of Galatia.*" These were not different denominations, but local congregations in different localities that taught, believed, practiced and worshipped the same way, following the same rule and authority; being one in the essentials such as government, doctrine, work and worship.

Do Names Really Matter?

There is also a popular idea in religious circles that there is nothing in a name, when you speak religiously. It is true that wearing the right name is not all there is that is important. But the notion that what name you wear is unimportant is not true in religion or any other activity and realm. Nor do people believe there is nothing in a name, even religiously, although to justify denominationalism they will say that.

God evidently considers names important. Genesis 5:2 He called Adam by his name on the day he was created. He gave and changed the names of Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, Jacob to Israel. He even designated the name that John the Baptist would wear. He specified the name of His Son. "*Thou shalt call his name Jesus.*" Christ was prophesied to have the name Emmanuel, Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Prince

of Peace, all found in Isaiah chapters seven and nine. If you think there is nothing in a name then you have a different viewpoint from God.

In other areas we recognize the value, even the necessity of correct names. This is true in business, naming your children, names on checks, trademarks, etc. Would you name you child Jezebel or Judas? Why some consider names unimportant is not difficult to discover. It is because the religious denominational world has a wide variety of names and in the desire to defend and retain these unbiblical names they have adopted the foolishness of contending there is nothing in a name. But they do not really believe it themselves because they are insistent on wearing their particular denominational name to the exclusion of all others. Consistency is not apparent in denominationalism.

As The Oracles

While the church is never called by a proper title in the New Testament, it is given several significant descriptions and identifications. More often than not it is simply called *"the church."* After all, since there is only one, why identify it with divisive denominational terms?

First Corinthians 1:2, the church is called *"the church of God."* We have read several places where it is called the body of Christ, the house of God. Romans 16:16, referring to several congregations, we find the phrase, *"churches of Christ."* All of these terms show possession; showing that the church belongs to God and Christ. *"The church of the living God"* is found in First Timothy 3:15, and *"the church of the first born"* in Hebrews 12:23. If there was only one automobile in all the world, one would not have to specify the brand to identify the automobile. Since there is only one church that belongs to God it can be identified simply as *"the church"* and that should be sufficient. It would be sufficient, except men have organized and invented their own denominational churches to the confusion of the entire religious scene.

The redeemed people who make up the church are called saints, disciples, and the proper name *"Christian."* *"And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."* (Acts 11:26). The same name is found in First Peter 4:16 and Acts 26:28. By this name we honor the founder, builder, foundation and Savior of the church, Jesus Christ. *"Christian"* means one who is of Christ. This name was given by God as Isaiah prophesied He

would give His people a new name (Isaiah 62:2). The word “called” shows that Deity gave the term.

Of Other Names

Names that give distinction to men (Luther, John the Baptist, etc.) or doctrines, governments, or anything else are without Biblical authority. Some might complain, “You want the name Christian just for yourself.” That is not true. It is true we only want the name “*Christian*,” but not just for self. We would that all people everywhere would be content to wear this Biblical name and exclude the many divisive and unbiblical denominational names that men have accumulated to themselves. It is always right to “*speak as the oracles of God*.” (First Peter 4:11).

One additional point with respect to wearing titles that is the practices of clergymen of the denominational world. That also is without authority, even contrary to the teaching of Christ. There are those who must heap to themselves some distinction above others in the “church” with titles that set them apart as being “somewhat.” They call themselves Reverend and many other self-glorifying titles. Jesus taught, “*Call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven*.” Yet, men will wear religious titles of Father. Can you imagine Peter, Paul, James and John being called Reverend, the Right Reverend, Holy Father, or some of the other titles men heap upon themselves? Did not Jesus teach against the attempt to exalt oneself above others? (Matthew 20:24-28).

Even the term “minister” is not a title and should not be so used. The word simply designates one who serves. I prefer being called simply a preacher rather than anything that would be used as a title. Preacher simply defines my work. I get disgustingly amused as some who harp against the church for being “traditional” but who used descriptive terms of work as titles. They will write about Bishop This, Elder That, Pastor Somewhat. The rage today is to be called Doctor Something. There is a sickening mania among some to give everybody some title. We have seen some church letterheads with a list of titled staff personnel that would rival any corporation in the country. This is a display of arrogance and violation gone to seed.

The terms elder, brother, sister, preacher, minister, etc. define the work involved but are not titles and ought not be so used. Job wrote, “*Let me not, I pray you, respect any man’s person, neither will I give flattering titles unto any man. For I know not*

to give flattering titles.” (Job 32:21,22). We need more Jobs. Servants of God who work for Him do not seek nor allow such things concerning themselves.

Such then is the teaching of the Bible regarding the number of churches Jesus built and the identifications used for that church. There is sufficient beauty in truth and it ought not be marred with the ideas, doctrines, practices, inventions and ambitions from men. We have no right to take liberties with God’s revelation, but we have the privilege of conforming ourselves to it. Let us be busy in doing just that.

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The Builder and Foundation of the Church

With so many matters confronting us in life, if we are not careful, we can lose sight of our eventual goal, slip loose from the declarations of God’s truth that anchor the soul, and lose sight of what really matters. We need to refresh our minds and keep informing ourselves and those not yet in Christ of the basic, fundamental, first principle and elementary points of the doctrine of Christ.

First Peter 3:15, *“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.”* We have a hope which we expect to realize. We need to know and be able to teach why we all must be Christians. Our material in this lesson, although familiar to some, is not know to all. Even to those that know it we would remind ourselves of the words of Peter in Second Peter 1:12, *“Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.”*

It is important that we be in the Lord’s church, that body He has promised to save. One church is not as good as another, nor are we allowed the right to choose the church of our choice as if it did not matter. We are urged to choose the church of God’s choice.

The Builder

Psalm 127:1, *"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it."* No church is the right church unless it was built by the right builder. The very existence of a religious body is evidence that it was founded by someone and upon some foundation. There are hundreds of churches and all of them had a beginning and started by someone. The right builder of the church that God approves is Jesus Christ. Christ did not build hundreds of churches, each contradicting the other, different one from another, teaching things that He never taught nor authorized to be taught. It is important to be in the church that Christ built.

In Matthew 16:18 Jesus promised to build His church. The church belongs to Him and He is the founder of it. If a church was founded by Henry the Eighth, John Wesley, Joseph Smith, Martin Luther, or any other person, it is not the church Jesus built. This fact eliminates all denominations from being the Lord's church because Jesus never built a denomination. Most of them acknowledge someone else as their founder anyway.

In Matthew 16:19 Jesus gave authority to Peter and later to all of the apostles, giving them the "keys" to the kingdom. Nobody else could ever assume such authority to say what Jesus said or speak in His name as did the apostles and other inspired men. Nobody else has the right to instruct regarding the Lord's church except they teach what those authorized to teach had taught. Those who would preach truth have no right to teach anything other than what Jesus authorized the apostles to preach and teach. Christ alone possesses all authority as was given Him by the Father. He alone had the right to build the church. Only that which He built is approved of God.

Not by John

The church was not established by John the Baptist. The term "Baptist" is a term denoting what John did, not the name of the Lord's church. It is not an authorized religious name to be worn by anybody. While some say the church was established during the life of John, Matthew 14:10 tells how John was beheaded by Herod and it was two chapters later in Matthew sixteen that Jesus was still talking about building the church in the future. John was dead before the church became a reality.

In Matthew 11:11 Jesus said, *"Verily I say unto you, among*

them that are born of woman there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist; notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he." How could that be? His complimentary words of John the Baptist also shows us that John was never in the kingdom because John was dead before the kingdom, the church, was established on Pentecost.

An illustration can help us here. One might say that there is none greater in elementary school than John, but he that is least in high school is greater than he. This can be said only because John is not in high school. The church Jesus built was not built in John's lifetime.

Nothing Could Prevent It

Even the gates of Hades could not prevent the establishment of the Lord's church (Matthew 16:18). Nor shall Satan be victorious over the Lord's church. His church, the kingdom, is an everlasting kingdom. Those who are faithful citizens therein shall never be destroyed but shall live eternally with God. Even the death of Christ did not prevent its coming (Acts 2:31). Nor can all the power of Satan drive it from existence.

But notice what Jesus said when speaking of religions founded upon the traditions of men. Matthew 15:9,13, "*But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men... But he answered and said, Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up.*" Churches built by someone other than Christ have not the hope of eternal life founded on truth. This is a blessing that belongs only to those in the church that Christ built.

Regardless of our prejudices, previous learning or misunderstanding, this is the truth. We must live and shall be judged according to this truth. But does not this truth motivate us and provoke us to want to be sure we are in the church that Christ built? How do you consider the matter?

The Foundation

Not only is Jesus the builder of the church, He is also the foundation upon which it is built. No building or institution can be stronger than its foundation. The church that claims to be the church of the Bible must also have the foundation the Bible declares it must have. Matthew 16:16-18 tells us the church is built upon that great truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of

God. Christ promised to build it and He identified the foundation Rock upon which it stands.

There are varying views among men as to what is the Rock upon which the church is founded. Some have said the church was built on Peter. But you can take away Peter and the church remains. But take away Christ, and what is left? The truth is, the Rock is the truth Peter confessed concerning the identity of Christ as God's Son. Needless to say, you remove that fact and nothing about the church or Christianity can stand. Nothing remains. because authority is destroyed.

There are several reasons why we can be sure the Rock is Peter's confession. The word translated "*Peter*" is a different word from that which is translated "*rock*." Peter is from "*petros*," while rock is from "*petra*." The first is masculine gender and the second is feminine. The first means a mere pebble or stone while the second means a solid, massive ledge of rock. One was small enough to be tossed about while the other was a mountain. Surely, words of such difference would not refer to the same thing in the same sentence.

The Lord had given Simon the name Peter or Cephas. It means a stone (John 1:42). Rather than declaring Peter as the Rock on which the church is built, Christ drew a sharp contrast between Peter and the Rock upon which the church is built.

One Foundation

Such a conclusion is inescapable also in the light of First Corinthians 3:11, "*For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*" Ephesians 2:20 speaks of the foundation of the apostles but only with reference to what the apostles preached; namely, Christ. Isaiah 28:16, "*Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone of sure foundation.*" In Matthew twenty-one Jesus applied that prophecy to Himself, not Peter. Peter did not apply that prophecy to himself, but Christ (Acts 4:10,11). Peter knew what the foundation of the church is (First Peter 2:7). We wonder why people cannot grasp it today.

We are not made to wonder why enemies of the church will constantly strike against the truth that Jesus is the Son of God. When one does not wish to be subject to Christ he must do something to destroy the authority of Christ. Christ as the Son of God means authority. When one does not want to serve God but live his own way and "do his own thing," he must satisfy

himself somehow with some excuse for not doing so. When one seeks to destroy the church and that for which it stands he must uproot, if he can, the foundation of the church because if he can do that the entire structure of Christianity collapses.

Many have this desire and this explains the reason for atheism, skepticism, modernism, humanism, existentialism, and other “isms,” even that which has been called a “new hermeneutics,” and other “isms” that are vicious and venomous enemies of Christ, His Word and His church. This is why such liberal organizations as the National Council of Churches and the liberal seminaries and colleges seek to undermine His Deity. They are not content to be guided by the Word of God, seeking their own subjective way in preference to God’s way.

But the truth regarding Christ, the foundation and builder of the church, remains. Like the legendary anvil that has withstood the battering of many hammers, so the truth stands against all its foes. And so shall it ever be.

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When and Where the Church Began

With the motive to refresh our minds and to inform, we study a subject that assumes the church does exist. If this is not apparent in our own day it certainly was obvious in the days of the first century of which we read in the New Testament. A study of the church is far more important than many realize. It has more to do with our eternal salvation than many admit. But not only is the knowledge of when and where the church began of importance to us eternally, it also has some very day-to-day applications that are useful and needful for us in living the Christian life. Especially is this true in the work of spreading the borders of the kingdom.

Such a study ought to increase our respect for the church and the significance the Lord has placed upon it. We need to have reverence for the divine side of the church. While the principles of God’s dealings with man have been essentially the same in every dispensation, the specifics are different now than under

the Patriarchal and Mosaic Ages. We live under the will of Christ and shall be judged by His words (John 12:48).

When we realize that the church belongs to Christ, we understand that we cannot take an indifferent attitude toward the church that is His. Furthermore, since the church is His, bought by Him by His blood, built by Him, all that concerns the church concerns Christ. Everything from the terms of entrance to the ultimate disposition of the church is significant because of Christ and His relationship to the church.

Once we realize the truth that the church is composed of the saved, we begin to see more clearly the importance of the church to ourselves. Christ is the Savior of the church (Ephesians 5:23). So if we expect to be saved, we must be in His church. Outside of Christ there is no salvation and the church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23).

Not A Denomination

I seldom if ever preach about the church that I do not emphasize we are not talking about a denomination. There simply is not anything in the Bible to justify a denomination. Why should I preach about one? It is a shame that even many in the church have so little knowledge of the church that they, like others who are confused in religion, consider the church to be just another denomination. That is not so and never has been so. If a church is the church of Christ it is not a denomination. If it is a denomination it is not the church of Christ. Therefore, we have no real concern about the details of various denominations except to oppose them and the division upon which they feed and which they propagate. Why should anybody want to uphold what they never find in God's Word anyway?

We study the "when and where" of the beginning of the church together because so many of the passages that speak of one, speak of both.

The Kingdom

We need to emphasize one additional point of introduction. Let us learn from the Scriptures that the church and the kingdom of God and Christ are one and the same. We will offer here just one or two passages proving this even though there are many others we could cite. Those in the church in Colosse were said to be in the kingdom. *"Who hath delivered us out of the*

power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.” (Colossians 1:13). Church members were citizens in the kingdom. “And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.” (Matthew 16:16,17). Here our Lord used the terms “church” and “kingdom” interchangeably. How foolish it would have been for Him to build one thing but give the apostles the keys to something else.

We could talk about passages that teach how we are baptized into Christ, into His body, and how one enters the kingdom by being born of water and the Spirit. All these things go to prove the church and the kingdom to be one and the same divine institution from God.

Not in Former Ages

Men have presented a number of doctrines regarding when the church began. Some have even contended it began in Abram’s day. Others say in the time of Moses. Many teach it began during the life of John the Baptist. (Another lesson in this book deals with this error.) Some even claim the church has been established but not the kingdom and that the kingdom is yet to come in the future, even though Paul spoke of those who were already in the kingdom. Just how some could already have been in the kingdom if the kingdom has not yet come is an insurmountable problem for those who try to separate the church from the kingdom. But when we know the truth of the Bible as to when the church or kingdom began, obviously anything at variance with that truth is error. We shall learn when it did begin, not when it did not.

In Jerusalem

Let us consider eight signs the Lord said would accompany the beginning of the kingdom or church. Isaiah 2:2-4 gives us three signs. *“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house*

of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths, for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."

To All Nations

The kingdom would begin in Jerusalem. It would begin "*in the last days.*" All nations would flow unto it. In other words, people of all nations would be included. It would not be a nationalistic economy like the Judaistic or Mosaic system. The "*house of the Lord*" refers to the church. Paul called the church the "*house of God.*" (First Timothy 3:15). Doubtless the house of God and the kingdom of God refer to the same thing and both refer to the church.

In The Last Days

The "*last days*" are defined for us in Hebrews 1:1 as the time when God speaks to man through His Son. The Bible presents to us three dispensations. A dispensation is a system by which God governs man for a period of time. God governed men under a Patriarchal system, then Israel under the Mosaic system, and now all men under the system of Christ. The church began at the very beginning of the last dispensation. Joel had prophesied of its beginning in Joel two, to which Peter made direct reference in his sermon on Pentecost and said the events of Pentecost fulfilled Joel's prophecy. There is no use looking for another place than Jerusalem, nor another time than the last days, for the beginning of the church that belongs to Christ.

In the Days of Rome

Daniel two records a more specific time from a dream of Nebuchadnezzar and the image he saw in his dream. This is the fourth of the eight signs to which this lesson refers. The Babylonian king saw an image with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, and legs of iron with feet of a mixture of iron and clay. A stone, "*not made with hands,*" that is, from God, smote the image and broke it into pieces and

grew to fill the earth.

Daniel's interpretation of the dream was that the image represented four kingdoms of which Babylon was the first. The stone smiting the image was the kingdom of God and the symbolism of His kingdom being superior to all the others. It would be in the days of "*these kings*," the kings of the fourth kingdom, that God would establish His kingdom.

Following Babylon came the Medo-Persian empire, then the Grecian, and finally Roman. It was during the days of the Roman empire that John the Baptist came preaching the "*kingdom of heaven is at hand*," which means nearby or soon to be. Christ and His apostles preached the same message. It was during the time of Rome's domination of the known world.

We need not look anywhere else but Jerusalem, or any other time than the "*last days*," more specifically, during the days of the Roman empire for the establishment of God's church.

In Their Lifetime

Sign five is a statement of Jesus. "*And he said unto them, Verily, I say unto you, that there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.*" (Mark 9:1). In the lifetime of some of those to whom Jesus personally spoke the kingdom would come. It either did, or Jesus is a false prophet. Furthermore, it was to come with power, and Jesus identified that power as the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). This ties perfectly with the prophecy of Joel to which Peter referred in Acts two, the day the Holy Spirit came on the apostles; the day the church began; the day the kingdom began.

Coming of the Holy Spirit

Sign six, already mentioned, is the prophecy of Joel. "*And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions, and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit.*" (Joel 2:28,29). Peter said this would take place in the "*last days*." We might be wise not to be dogmatic in explaining every facet of this prophecy in detail. But we would suggest that Peter knew what he was talking about when he said of the events on Pentecost, "*This is*

that which was spoken by the prophet Joel,” and let it rest that. The sign of the coming of the kingdom with power was the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

After the Ascension

The seventh sign to which we refer is the prophecy in Daniel seven of the Son of Man going to the Ancient of Days and receiving a kingdom (Daniel 7:13,14). This had prophetic reference to the ascension of Christ (called the Son of Man to emphasize His humanity as well as Deity) and His return into heaven to the Father (Ancient of Days). Once there, and assuming His place at the *“right hand of God,”* a phrase denoting authority and rule, His kingdom was given Him. This came on Pentecost, shortly after the ascension.

The Message

The eighth sign of the coming of the kingdom was what Jesus said would take place *“at the beginning.”* Luke 24:47, *“And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name beginning at Jerusalem.”* This is exactly the message that is recorded as being preached in Acts two on the day of Pentecost after the resurrection and ascension of Christ into heaven. (Acts 2:38).

The church began, as is evident from New Testament testimony. Christ is declared as its head (Ephesians 1:22,23). Churches existed in many cities. Letters were sent to many congregations. Elders were ordained over churches. People were members of the church. But now we can determine the exact time when the church began and how people became members of it. This is important because people become members of the church, the saved, the same way today.

Finding the Beginning

Let us come backward in establishing the time. Begin in Acts five when the church was obviously in existence because Ananias and Saphirra sinned and their punishment struck fear on all the church. It existed then. Come back to John the Baptist, who preached the kingdom was *“at hand.”* But it did not come in his lifetime. He was beheaded by Herod for preaching the truth concerning his adulterous relationship with

Herodias. Even after his death Jesus was still promising to build the church in the future (Matthew 16:16-18). So it is easy to see the church did not come in the lifetime of John the Baptist, denominational teachers notwithstanding. It came sometime between Jesus' promise and Acts five, however.

The first time we read of people being in the church is in Acts two when we read of the saved, those who had heard, believed and obeyed the gospel, were added to the church (Acts 2:47). Even after the resurrection and ascension of Christ the apostles were still looking for the kingdom (Acts one). So it had not come by the time Jesus was lifted into heaven. We should not have expected it to come before the ascension in view of the prophecy of Daniel seven that we mentioned.

Signs Fulfilled

But Acts two is important because on that day the power came. The Holy Spirit fell upon the apostles. They began to preach as the Spirit gave them utterance. Manifestations of power were evident. The apostles could miraculously speak in languages they had never learned so that people of many nations could hear the gospel. They were in the city of Jerusalem. The old law had been nailed to the cross, and this was the first day of the new age. Rome, the fourth empire, was in power over the land. Christ had ascended. Many who had heard Jesus preach were still alive. The message Jesus said would be proclaimed was proclaimed. What sign that had been foretold as denoting the coming of the kingdom failed to take place on that first Pentecost after the Lord's ascension? Friend, everything that had been prophesied occurred.

Furthermore, from this point forward we read of the church in existence. People were added to it. Congregations were established near and far. The gospel spread and people were saved by the Christ. The events at the house of Cornelius reminded Peter of certain things that had taken place "*at the beginning.*" (Acts 11:15).

Pentecost

On the day of Pentecost many heard the Word, some three thousand believed what they heard, and obeyed what they were commanded to do; namely, repent and be baptized for the remission of sins. Those that did that were added to the church.

This is how people entered the church then. This is how people enter the church that belongs to Christ now.

Having once begun, the church can never begin again. In or around the year thirty-three A.D. (some say 30 A.D. depending on the calendar count one uses) the church of Christ, the kingdom of God, the company of the saved, began.

Are you a member of that church? Have you done as did those in Bible times to enter the church of Christ? Until you do, you are lost, for the church is the saved, and it is the church, the body, that Christ shall save (Ephesians 5:23). It is the kingdom that Christ shall deliver to the Father when He comes again (First Corinthians 15:24). We urge everyone to be in His church and live faithfully until death overtakes us.

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Comments That Encourage

Below are several expressions received lately regarding this booklet, ***A Burning Fire***. Included is just the comment without identification of the one who sent it or from what locale. But such words as these do a great deal to encourage this effort and renew determination to continue its publication as long as possible. A sincere thanks to everyone.

"I received your book, ***A Burning Fire***, from a relative earlier this year. I read it over and over again. It was very inspirational to me. May I please be put on your mailing list?"

"I enjoy reading another man's copy. Keep up the good work."

"Thank you for your continuing help through the publication, ***A Burning Fire***. I find it very helpful in my personal study."

"I just want to write a note to let you know how much I enjoy each issue of ***A Burning Fire***. I look forward to getting them."

"We enjoy reading ***A Burning Fire***. Keep up the good work."

"Please keep it coming I appreciate the good, sound material in this paper."

"We thoroughly enjoy and appreciate this. It is our favorite because of clarity and truth. Thank you."

Many have written and simply said, "Thanks."

"I use **A Burning Fire** for both Sunday sermon material and radio lessons. It is a valuable work you do."

"I truly appreciate receiving **A Burning Fire** and its quality and soundness.

"I enjoy and appreciate **A Burning Fire** more than words can express. It is a real aid for a young preacher like myself and I do want to keep receiving it. May God bless you for your service to other preachers of like precious faith."

"I always pass it on to others to read because it is so good."

"When it comes I sit right down and read every word and often reread it. The lessons are so good."

"I find your book very interesting and informative."

"I get a lot of good material out of this book. Keep up the good work. I, for one, really benefit from it."

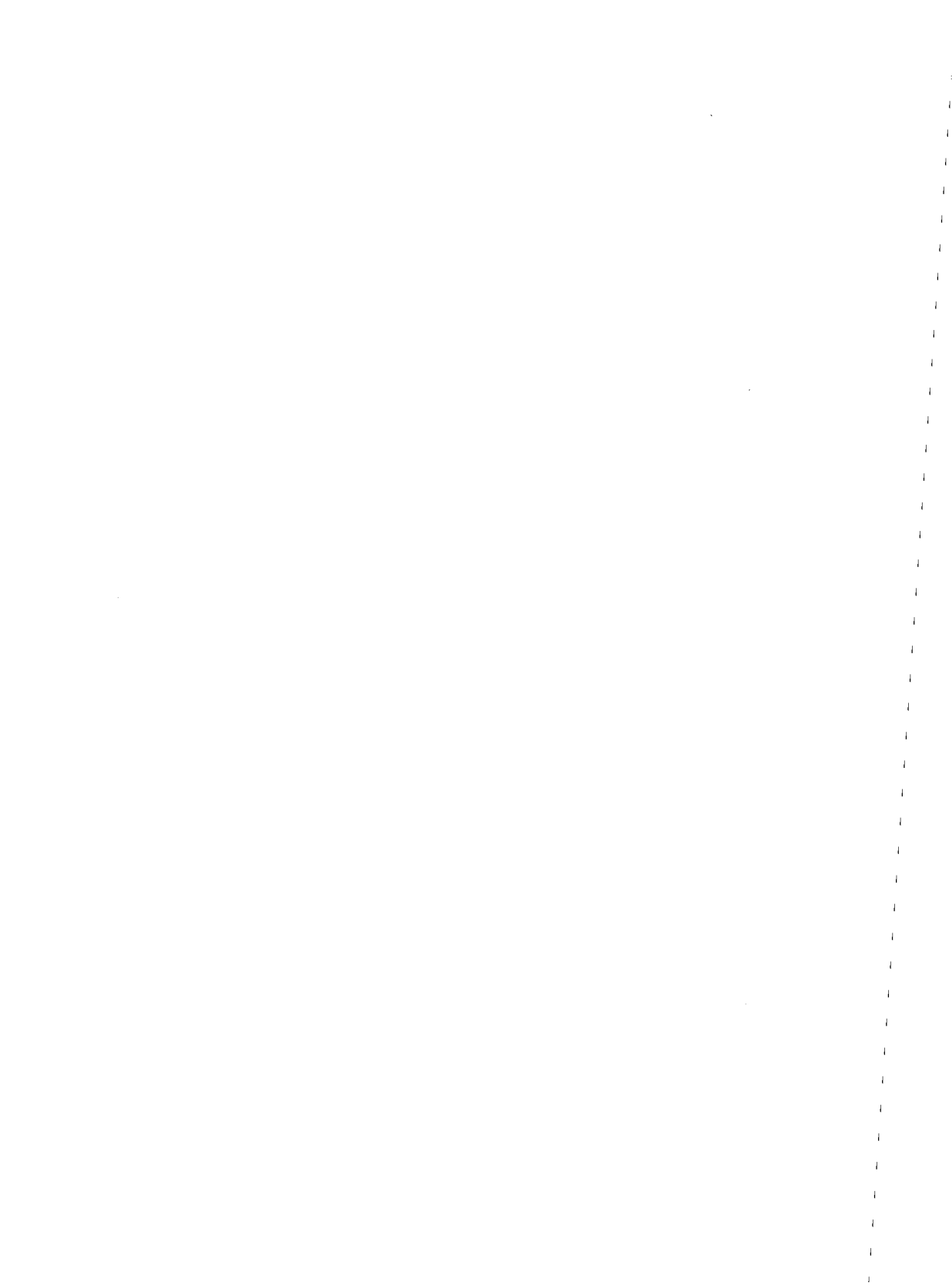
"I thoroughly enjoy reading **A Burning Fire**. It's well written and very practical for our day. The truth never changes."

"I read all of each issue as they come. They are kept for future use by myself and others."

"Thanks for continuing this fine publication."

Recently I printed a picture of one of my grandchildren on the back cover and one wrote, "I like the picture on that issue better than the one usually on the back."

I have copied these comments not for boasting but to let it be known how much I appreciate the encouragement I receive from those who read **A Burning Fire**. When I get words like these I am like the person on the car commercial on television, "Who could ask for anything more?" JWB



Many Do Not Read

Is there any real difference between the person who cannot read and the one who will not read? Yes, there is a real difference in ability. But as far as receiving the benefits of reading, there is none. One has not yet developed the talent and the other buries it.

Many, even brethren, do not read, at least, not much. It is difficult to encourage some to read every day from the Scriptures. Most can read but have decided they will not. At least they do not read the Bible or good material that helps them learn the way of the Lord.

Yes, those who can read will seldom miss the newspaper and all its columns. They read directions about various items of interest. But their hunger and thirst to know about God's Word and God's people does not seem to exist. They are content to remain ignorant, but to their peril.

We should be careful what we read because it influences our mind and life. But we cannot afford to stay uninformed, misinformed concerning the matters of the soul. It is fair to say that what we read reflects to a great extent what our heart truly treasures.

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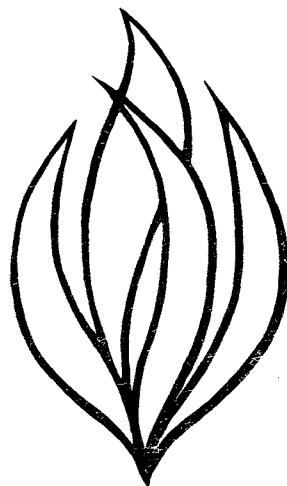
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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).



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Church Discipline

Number One

Something is wrong with a preacher or anyone else when he feels he must apologize for preaching any portion of the truth of God. Yet, some feel apologetic (not in the sense of defending) regarding this subject. We are aware that there be some who strongly object to a discussion of the theme of church discipline for various reasons, or should I say, excuses. But if any apology is due it is because of the failure to preach on the subject enough to keep brethren informed about it and the necessity of it.

Often the objection raised is that it is not the proper time to discuss it. They claim to have no real objection to discipline but they never seem to determine an appropriate timing to do it. There may well be times when a certain study may be more effective than other times. But no part of the truth is untimely. The gospel is to be preached *"in season, out of season."* (Second Timothy 4:2). We would agree that the study of church discipline may create fewer problems when there is no disciplinary matter before the congregation and the church is at peace. But again, when there are disorderly members being tolerated may be just the time the study is needed the most. Paul certainly thought so because he discussed discipline with Corinth at the very time there was a pressing need for it.

Trouble over church discipline often arises because people will allow personalities to mean more to them than principles of truth. Being in ignorance of the Word of God, they twist and wrest the Scriptures to make them fit some particular problem, person or situation and try to make the Scriptures apply directly to that person, problem or situation without warrant. The only way to remove trouble about church discipline is to have a knowledge of the truth on it and love that truth more than anything else.

Questions and Answers

Our study shall consist of asking several relevant and pertinent questions on the subject and search the Scriptures for the answers. But let us begin by quoting a pamphlet entitled, "The Forgotten Commandment." We cite these remarks, not as divine authority, but because the sentiments he expresses are

such that we can and should concur:

A lack of discipline is responsible for the chaos in which the world finds itself. Disregard for authority is evident on every hand. Discipline has faded into almost complete obscurity in the affairs of nations, states, communities, and has all but disappeared from the church of God. No home can be strong without discipline. No church can properly function without discipline. No nation can stand if its people flagrantly disregard discipline.

The early church believed and practiced discipline. It always disciplined with the right objective in mind. The early church grew and multiplied because it worked constantly to maintain its purity. Discipline was used over and over to accomplish this.

Today, about every sin that can be found in the world can also be found in the church. There is a tendency to wink at sin among God's children and excuse it with the excuse that to try to correct it is to meddle into peoples' lives. This is not true. It is the duty of the church to reprove, rebuke, exhort - even to cull out, delete, to withdraw fellowship from all who walk in an unruly manner and will not repent.

The matter of discipline has been carelessly handled in many cases. Discipline has been used as a means to get even with someone - as a club with which to destroy. This is not New Testament discipline and the ones who practice such are themselves in need of discipline.

When a tree is pruned and kept in a healthy state it bears more fruit. When the rotten apple is thrown out of the peck the others are saved. When an infected member of the physical body is either restored or removed the entire body

functions more perfectly. When the church is kept pure by pruning, weeding out, even by withdrawing in the extreme cases, it will grow as we have never seen it grow before.

We are hard-pressed to see how anyone could disagree with these sentiments if they have the welfare of the church and their brethren collectively and individually at heart.

What is Discipline?

What is meant by discipline? Whether we are talking about discipline in the home, state, church or wherever, it can be divided into two areas, preventive and corrective. Most people think of discipline only in terms of correction and punishment. But this misses one major part of discipline. Discipline is training. Training molds, strengthens, perfects, directs correctly, as well as making corrections. Discipline also includes punishment, rebuke and chastisement. Discipline is a means of enforcing obedient and orderly conduct. It is the rule or system affecting the manner of one's life. Training in obedience to a given standard is discipline, according to Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.

According to these definitions, we can see that every sermon, every Bible class is included in discipline. These are efforts to properly train. This is preventive discipline. Reproving, rebuking are also a part of discipline in the corrective area. Discipline includes punishment but punishment is only one form of discipline. In our homes we teach our children the way they should go, and this is preventive discipline. We punish them when they misbehave and this is corrective discipline. The same principle applies when dealing with church discipline.

There has been this kind of discipline in every dispensation. In the Patriarchal Age God instructed Adam and Eve what they were to do. He also punished them when they violated His will. God warned Lot and his wife about escaping from Sodom. Lot's wife was punished when she disobeyed. The people were warned in Noah's day and punished in the flood. In all these cases there was corrective and preventive discipline.

In the Mosaic Age God gave the law of Israel for their instruction. Israel was punished when they defied God. They were told what to do with the treasures and spoils of Jericho. When this was violated not only Achan but the entire nation

suffered. Over and over we could cite examples of both kinds of discipline in this dispensation.

The Christian Age records disciplinary actions. There is the very severe case of Ananias and Sapphira when they lied to the Holy Spirit in Acts five regarding their contributions and were smitten with death. The Corinthians were taught regarding the standards of morality and the immoral one was to be taken from their company if he did not repent of his sins. So we have no reason to be surprised that discipline is appropriate now.

Who is to be Disciplined?

In one sense every person is to be subject to discipline because every person needs the training and direction from God. For this reason the church should maintain the best teaching program it is capable of having. Preventive discipline is applicable to all.

In the event preventive discipline fails, Paul instructs, *“Now we command you brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.”* (Second Thessalonians 3:6). Again, *“If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.”* (Second Thessalonians 3:14). Disorderly is defined as not walking after what the apostles taught. Those who do not obey the word are disorderly. It means “not according to the order of things.” It can be illustrated by a soldier who will not keep in step and breaks the ranks.

Second John 9-11 teaches, *“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed: for he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds.”* To add to or take away from God’s Word makes one subject to disciplinary action.

Titus 3:10-11, *“A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition reject, knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.”* A heretic is a factious man who shows more concern for part than the whole; who pays little to no attention to the Word and does as he wants to the injury of all.

First Corinthians 5:1-5 presents a severe problem of immorality in the church. *"It is commonly reported that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in the body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."* Paul called for disciplinary action to purge the sin (flesh) and save the soul (spirit).

"Now I beseech you brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned, and avoid them." (Romans 16:17). Again, Titus 1:9-13, *"Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. One of themselves even a prophet of their own said, The Cretians are alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth."* This is calling for disciplinary action.

Personal Offenses

One who trespasses against a brother and will not repent of it is the object of discipline. Matthew 18:15-17, *"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone; if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church, but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican."*

Let us notice that in every instance, the discipline is meted out only in cases of overt action and regarding observable sins. Discipline is not executed in matters that remain merely matters

of the heart. We do not infer that sins of the heart are not deadly. We simply point out that the sins subject to corrective discipline are sins that are observable and detectable; sins that have possibly shown an evil heart but the showing is evident. While we can and must discipline preventively in matters of both heart and action, we are limited in disciplining in a corrective manner in matters of the heart because man is limited in knowing the heart. When we try to judge the heart we have over-stepped our prerogatives and entered into the realm where only God is able to know (First Samuel 16:7). We can discipline in matters of adultery (overt action) but are limited in matters of lust, unless lust has demonstrated itself. Judging the heart is left to God and forbidden man (Matthew 7:1-5).

In answer to our question, "Who is disorderly?" we quote an adequate comment by G. C. Brewer when he wrote, "Any person who sins is in need of the encouragement and admonition of faithful Christians; but only the person who sins and is impenitent, defiant, and shows the purpose to continue his sins should be considered disorderly." And, "We would say that any person who persists in sin, any sin, or who refuses to repent or correct his sins, should be regarded as disorderly and should be dealt with as such."

Purpose of Discipline

What is the purpose of discipline? The Lord has given us in His Word the purposes for disciplinary action. Before we consider them, let us give attention to this word of caution. If the motive for disciplinary action, preventive or corrective, is not the same as the purpose the Lord has given, then God will judge and the one whose motive is impure stands as condemned before God as one who should be otherwise disciplined. It is possible that an evil motive may not be known by other brethren because motives are matters of the heart and are not always detectable to other men as we have noted. But we will not deceive God in this or any other matter. While we shall consider in a second lesson just who does the disciplining, we are now concerned with the motive and reasons for disciplinary action.

First Corinthians 5:5 shows that the purpose of discipline is to destroy the sin (flesh) and save the sinner (spirit). Let us emphasize that discipline is for the purpose of saving. The sinner cannot be saved if he continues in his wickedness. Galatians 6:1, "*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are*

spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." The word "restore" means to mend, re-equip for further use, to recover. Preventive discipline is directed to avoid sin. Corrective discipline is used to correct sin when it is not avoided. Discipline is to save the lost. Administration of discipline, as stated by G. C. Brewer quite well, "may look hard, but it is far better than to let the man be self-deceived and remain in sin till he must at last hear the same sentence pronounced by the Lord in the awful word, 'Depart.' Then it will be too late; and we, if we have connived at his sin, and become partakers of his guilt, will have to share his doom."

Second Thessalonians 3:14 already quoted cites discipline so that the sinner "*may be ashamed.*" It is designed to cause sufficient shame that the sinner will come out of his sinfulness. We can see that discipline is used because somebody loves somebody else enough to help them. We do not show love to let sin go unchecked. You show love by doing what is needful to turn the sinner from the error of his way and save a soul from death (James 5:19,20). Those who look upon disciplinary action as an insult have failed to learn God's Word. We do not consider the doctor insulting when he prescribes medicine when we are physically ill. We do not consider him insulting even if we have to have an operation and have part of us removed, if it is to save life. Why should we think brethren have lesser motives regarding the soul?

Discipline is to save the church from being overrun with sin. First Corinthians 5:6,7, Paul wrote, "*Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened.*" One spiritually diseased member affects the whole body. It must be cured, restored, or the whole body could die. Sin attracts sin. The Lord desires a church that is pure, holy, without blemish and wrinkle (Ephesians 5). In Revelation 2:5 the church in Ephesus did not correct the faults in it and the Lord said He would remove their candlestick, their light, from the whole church. Rebuke is for the purpose that all may be sound in the faith (Titus 1:13). If sin goes unchecked in the ranks of God's people it will not be too long before the whole world winks at sin and hypocrisy becomes the norm. The world will look with reproach on the very body of Christ. When God's rules are allowed to be broken and nothing said or done about it, the salt loses its savor and a bushel is placed over the lamp.

It is the work of the church to proclaim the truth to save the

world. What will the sinful world think of the church if those who compose the church have so little regard for the very message they are to preach? The attraction of purity is one of the drawing forces of the church. Dare we hide our light under the bushel and still expect to be the light of the world?

Once again, in order to emphasize, if we love those in sin, love the church, love the lost of the world, love the fallen brother, whosoever, we will love this truth regarding church discipline. Only a lack of love would allow us to suppress it.

Additional points regarding church discipline will be discussed in the next lesson.

† † † † †

Church Discipline

Number Two

Without taking time and space to review the previous lesson, let us pursue the theme of church discipline by continuing to ask important questions about it and find God's answers.

How to Administer

How is discipline to be administered? Preventive discipline is administered by teaching, preaching, training, informing, and showing by example. How corrective discipline is to be administered is dependent upon the nature of the transgression that must be handled. Is it a personal matter between brethren? Is it a private issue? Or is it a public transgression known far and wide and involves all? Personal offenses can become public offenses if they are not corrected on the personal level. Public offenses cannot be corrected privately or on the same scope as private problems. The effectiveness of discipline would thereby be nullified. Many are involved in publicly known sins. The whole church is affected openly.

Private -Personal

We earlier read from Matthew 18:15-17 regarding a personal issue between two brethren. The one who has been offended

has a responsibility to go to the offending brother and to try to settle the issue between them. Usually this will settle most situations when brethren are men of good will. Brethren of good will will seldom find it impossible to solve their problems. The reason the offended one has the duty to go to the offender is because the offender may be in a bad spiritual state and would never initiate a solution. It is also possible that the offender is not aware he has offended his brother. How could the offended initiate a reconciliation to a problem about which he is unaware?

If the two parties are not able to settle the situation on a quiet and relatively calm plane, then the offended one should take one or two others with him to discuss the matter with the offender. Please note the "low key" approach to the problem thus far. It is not an open rift but a private affair. There is not the rushing to many, many others and spreading the problem. But there is the restricted approach to those involved and as few of others as is necessary. Surely, a few brethren together can settle nearly every matter that would ever arise between two brethren on a personal level when all involved really want a solution. This is often a real barrier, however!

However, if the matter be so serious and no solution is reached by this time, the issue should be taken before the whole church with the hope and intent that the consideration of the whole body will be brought to bear on those involved and a solution found. There is the pressure of all the brethren on the evil doer. If a sinful brother defies the whole church and refuses to make correction, then he is to be considered an outcast, not because the others are so righteous, but because he has made himself so unrighteous. The offender should clear up his offense regardless of what anybody else does or does not do. If he will not, he is to be numbered among those with whom faithful brethren no longer will have fellowship until such time as he repents of the error of his way. This is clear.

Personal problems and disputes ought not be allowed to become public disputes. They ought to be solved on the personal level and then allowed to die. Some prefer to blast out against others sometimes even before the one they are blasting is even aware of the personal offense. But when personal offenses are not settled and it becomes a matter for the whole church to handle, then things have become intolerable.

Public

Next, let us consider the administration of discipline when the transgression has been public before all, known to many, recognized by all and possibly involving many and affecting the whole congregation, even the whole brotherhood. When a brother sins publicly, openly, it is already outside the level of a personal issue, but the very nature of the offense, be it evil behavior, false teaching, whatever disorderly manner he commits, makes it a public issue for the church. Such a case is found in First Corinthians five where one man's immorality was threatening the welfare of the entire church. We cannot cover public sins in a private manner. This would destroy the purposes of discipline; namely, the preservation of the church and the example of the church before the world it strives to save. It is necessary that the world knows that the church opposes sin, even in its own members. *"Them that sin rebuke before all, that others may also fear."* (First Timothy 5:20). There is value in public rebuke that cannot be dismissed.

It is not proper for one to openly sin through conduct or teaching and expect to cover it up quietly and others never even know that sin has been confessed and forgiveness sought. It is not proper for one to openly teach error and then go into some room and quietly admit he was wrong to a few but never make correction openly as he taught. As one has illustrated, Johnny may make a mistake on his paper at his desk in arithmetic and correct it with only he and the teacher knowing about it and all is well. But let Johnny make the mistake at the chalkboard for all to see and nothing be done, then the whole class can and will be detrimentally affected. Public sins cannot be swept under a private rug lest the force of discipline be lost. We have seen in our time many false teachers want special treatment and "save face" by not openly admitting wrong. But it is better to save the soul than preserve one's pride and save face.

Furthermore, you should allow time for the one in error to be shown his sin, but you can talk to a person just so long. Eventually, it must be recognized that the sinner is not going to repent and discipline is mandatory. Judgment must be used to determine how long this time may be. But it surely must not be so long that when disciplinary measures are taken they have really lost their affect. It should not be so long as to make it appear the sin is being condoned. There comes the time when rebuke is no more the way, but rejection is in order (Titus 3:10,11). Paul said after the first or second admonition, reject.

Withdrawing Fellowship

If public pressure does not cause the sinner to turn, he must be avoided, company from him withheld, and fellowship withdrawn from him. To withdraw fellowship from a brother is the last and final effort to which we resort to cause the brother to repent. After all other efforts, preventive and corrective, have failed, *"Let him be unto thee as the Gentile and publican."* Deliver such a one to Satan (First Corinthians 5:5). Withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly (Second Thessalonians 3:6). Mark them and avoid them (Romans 16:17). This is as much a command from heaven as the one teaching baptism. It is God's will, not man's. The church cannot just allow sinful matters to exist without attention, nor can problems be disposed of through neglect and indifference. Just turning your back and pretending sin does not exist is often the way sins are handled in the church, but that is not the way God says to deal with them.

When one has had fellowship withdrawn from him that one is not just written off and forgotten. He is not to be treated like he was an enemy (Second Thessalonians 3:15) even though contact and association is limited. He is a fallen brother. Yet, we are to have no company with him, not so much as even to eat with him. There is no cause to hate him, but we must do what we are allowed to do to teach him the error of his way and turn him back again if possible (James 5:19,20). But we must never leave the impression with him or any other we condone his sin.

Who is to Administer Discipline?

All who preach and teach administer preventive discipline. Every good example is preventive discipline. Therefore, every Christian ought to be involved in preventive discipline. All have a power of influence and should persuade others to do right.

As for corrective discipline, again it depends somewhat on the nature of the problem. In personal offenses, the offended is to initiate the action as stated. In public transgressions the whole church is involved and the whole church has the duty to administer discipline. As with other matters pertaining to the local church, the eldership should and must take the lead. In matters of withdrawing fellowship, every Christian must cooperate lest the purpose of the action be lost and the sinful soul never brought to repentance. Paul says, *"Ye being gathered*

together.” (First Corinthians 5:4,5). All are involved. If some obey God and disfellowship a sinful impenitent brother but others ignore it as if sin was not to be rebuked, then disciplinary efforts will probably be so ineffective that the sinner will remain lost and those who refuse to cooperate are to blame. The responsibility rests upon all.

In the final phase of this study we consider some of the more often suggested objections to disciplinary action. We begin by saying there ought not be any objections since God has commanded that they be exacted. But still some raise objection.

It Is Judging

That’s right. We must recognize the difference between making judgments God has commanded and those God has forbidden. There is a difference between drawing a line by our authority and recognizing the line God has already drawn and revealed. When we obey God we are not sinning. To disobey God is to judge God and declare Him to be wrong. Should we attempt to exercise disciplinary actions in matters that are strictly of the heart there is valid complaint. But disciplinary action deals with the actions and observable sinfulness. We do not judge sinfully to recognize sin. We must judge to obey what God has said. To do otherwise is to commit sin.

But Everybody Sins

Nobody that knows the truth denies that (First John 1:8-10). I suppose even God knows that, and knew that when He commanded disciplinary action. But it is not true that one must be sinlessly perfect before he can exercise discipline toward another. All do not persist in sin. All are not disorderly, impenitent, defiant, rebellious. All do not teach false doctrines and divide the church with such. The very fact that God commands discipline ought inform us that somebody must do it.

But It May Cause Trouble

It will cause more trouble when it is not done. It will only cause trouble among those who do not love the lost and love the truth. Those kind of people may well get upset. But discipline, rightly done, is saving, not destroying. Would God command something that was designed to just cause trouble?

Did not God know what He was doing when He commanded it? Only when some are rebellious will it cause trouble. But this is trouble caused by truth and we shall not be guiltless if we seek to avoid this kind of trouble by sacrificing the will of God. When we all obey God there will be no trouble. It might cause trouble if people are not taught what discipline does and how it is to be done. This is why teaching the subject is imperative.

Leave It to God

I am for that! This is what we do when we hear what God has taught and when we comply to His teaching. We are leaving it to God. The Lord forbids addition or subtraction from His Word. He adds to the church and He takes away. He has told us who He adds and who He takes away. Indeed, leave it to God. When we obey we are leaving it to God.

Attitude

But a closing word about our attitude when discipline, preventive or corrective, is administered. There must be the love and desire to save a soul from death, spiritual death. There must be the willingness to act as love demands. We do not show love by ignoring sin. There must be constant self-examination. There is no room for a self-righteous or better-than-thou attitude. There must be an ever-present respect for the will of God. Unless the God-given purpose is our purpose we shall go astray in this matter of discipline.

There is nothing the devil loves more than for a Christian to sin, continue in sin, fall away, bring reproach on Christ, and damn his own soul. How Satan rejoices when such is the case. We are provoked to ask if we love the fallen brother as much as the devil. Will we put forth the difficult work of disciplining each other in order to save each other? It would be wonderful if preventive discipline would take care of all the problems. But the devil deceives and prevention is not always secured. So God, lovingly, has designed and delivered corrective measures. Since God loves us enough to provide these procedures, surely we ought to love God and one another enough to carry them out as He has taught us.

† † † † †

A Supernatural Event

The birth of Christ is sometimes called the Christmas Story. In the minds of many people the two are synonymous. But from the Biblical view they are not the same and some facts worthy of consideration must be noted. We do not know exactly the day, month, year that Jesus was born although we can approximate within certain limits. We do have evidence that it was not during the time of year when many celebrate His birth. The Bible does not authorize any celebration of the birth of Christ. To observe religious ceremonies that God approves we need Biblical authority or we become guilty of adding to the revealed Word of God which is prohibited. For these reasons faithful and knowledgeable Christians to not commemorate Christmas as the birth of Christ nor celebrate any other so-called religious "holy day" that has come into existence by the authority of men.

Authorized Attention

None should object to attention being given to His birth at anytime. Rather we are glad that people want to have recognition of His birth but would emphatically contend that all must be kept within the realm of what is authorized of God. We are glad that our nation has a day called Thanksgiving Day when attention is focused on being grateful to God for the blessings we receive from Him. But to consider a special religious "holy day" is to go beyond what is written. Unfortunately, only on these special days do some people ever give God any attention at all. Some do not even do so then but use the days for additional degenerate conduct. The season called Christmas has become more of a commercial enterprise and an excuse for indulgence, a time of revelry and sinful conduct rather than a glorification of Jesus Christ and recognition of His birth. During the season alledged to remember Christ there is the desecration of much that is sacred and holy and the will of Christ openly defied.

But the Lord's physical birth was a tremendous event. The spirit of giving that is observed during the Christmas season is commendable and worthy of encouragement. But we must seek to proclaim the Lord all year long and not just during certain seasons. We must admit it is refreshing to hear songs of

Christ amidst the noise of atheism, materialism and worldliness that even denies the birth of Christ by a virgin. With war, immorality, greed, crime and hatred abounding all around us, songs and words concerning Christ, when they are accurate, provide a brief and welcome respite from such evil. In this lesson we wish to emphasize the birth of Christ as the supernatural event that it was, and how it affirms the eternal nature of Christ and His Deity.

Historical and Supernatural

His birth is a historical event noted by both secular and sacred history and stands as part of the eternal sequence of events God designed. Christ existed before His birth as Jesus in Bethlehem. John 17:5, *"And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."* John 1:1-3, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made."* This "Word" is identified as God's only begotten in verse fourteen. His birth was a giant step in God's plan for man's redemption. Galatians 4:4 teaches He was born of woman, thereby becoming human as well as Deity. Many passages assert this fundamental truth regarding the nature of Jesus Christ. The historicity of His birth is attested by such an overwhelming mass of evidence that it is beyond refutation.

Was the supernatural event in a natural setting? Luke 2:4-7, *"And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth into Judea unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; [because he was of the house and lineage of David:] to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."* What could be more natural, even though not what usually was expected at the time of one's birth? Nothing miraculous is in evidence in the place of birth except it was prophesied that Bethlehem would be the place. But the supernatural was soon to be much in evidence in addition to the miraculous conception that had occurred earlier.

There was the star that was seen by the wise men (Matthew

2:2). Then the angelic hosts sang His praises (Luke 2:8-14). There was the revelation that a Savior was born (Luke 2:11). The setting was earthly but the event was miraculously announced as it was the result of a miraculous conception. Here was a supernatural event with supernatural distinctions and markings. When we deal with the birth of Christ we are dealing, not only with certain physical events that transpired, but with spiritual truth that often cannot be reduced to terms that will be accepted by those of a degenerate, materialistic and finite mind who want to force even these things in the naturalistic mold. The birth of Christ is predominantly miraculous from the announcement to Mary to people coming to worship Him in the stable. It is the event when God became flesh; the incarnation. Such is not a mere theological doctrine and concept, but a fact to be accepted by faith on the basis of the evidence and testimony of Scripture regarding it.

Keep in mind that Jesus Christ is the way that God has provided for mankind to be able to meet God favorably and be reconciled to Him. Access to God is through the person of His Son. It is not an irrational idea, therefore, for Deity to assume the nature of flesh. It would be strange if His birth had been anything other than supernatural and miraculous.

By The Virgin

The reality of the birth of Jesus by a virgin is an integral part of New Testament Christianity just as is His resurrection from the dead. There can be no acceptance of Christ without the acceptance of both events. There can be no acceptance of Scripture without acceptance of what Scripture teaches concerning Christ, including His birth by a virgin and His resurrection. There is hopeless inconsistency in that part of so-called "Christendom" that would say they accept Christ but reject as truth either the record of His birth or resurrection.

His birth by the virgin was the first of a long series of supernatural events surrounding Him. His perfection, His powers, His authority, His teaching, His atoning death, His victory over death, His ascension to the Father are all evidences of the same basic truth; namely, Jesus is God's Son, Deity in the flesh. To deny any one of these things about Christ is to make oneself anti-Christ.

His birth brought hope never before presented to mankind. Matthew 1:21, "*And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt*

call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins." Of this One Peter preached, *"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12). Jesus said of Himself, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."* (John 14:6).

The Effects

The birth of Christ was a supernatural event with immeasurable effects. No man can exhaust the implications of His birth. Profound, and yet so simple, this beautiful record thrills the heart of every person, even a child, that hears it. It causes the wise to wonder and the child to love.

The effects of His birth are varied. He came, not to bring peace, but a sword (Matthew 10:34). The peace He brought was peace between man and God, not necessarily peace between men and their fellowmen. Such cannot be expected since some reject the Christ that brings peace. From the very start of His life He was controversial, a target of enemies of truth, a victim of evil, but God's Son and the proclaimer of righteousness and salvation. In many ways He brought not unity but separation because some would become children of God and others would choose to remain children of the devil. But He did bring the way to re-establish peace with God for all who would follow in His steps.

One effect of His birth is seen in Christ changing the lives of people. Sinners are made saints by Him. Hatred is turned into love when His way is followed. Spiritual death is changed into spiritual life. No other can produce such effects as these except the Son of God. He also produced a fellowship that transcends racial, cultural and national boundaries. He brought into being the kingdom of God, which is His church, which includes people of every tongue, background and race who will respect Him and work His righteousness (Acts 10:34,35). He brought humanity into oneness with Deity. The birth of the Lord Jesus, proving His Deity, is at the foundation and cornerstone of the gospel, God's power to save mankind.

In sharp contrast to the effects of Christ in this world, what has atheism ever produced that is beneficial to mankind? Can there be named even one benefit? Yes, some atheists have produced benefit to others, but not because of atheism, but in spite of it. What can those who would destroy the dignity of man, the

standard of morality, the basis of civilization offer to anyone?

The birth of Christ brought rejoicing to many even as it struck terror and fear in the hearts of others. Here was the fulfillment of the promises and prophecies given years before as God moved into our world among men in a way and in a measure never before known. Bethlehem is the place where the eternal became temporal; where the Creator became as the creature; where God became man even as He remained God.

In the supernatural birth of Jesus Christ God accomplished something that never can be equated, surpassed nor repeated. On our own planet God became man's Friend and Neighbor, our Savior and Protector.

Proper Perspective

While we would not wish to go beyond the authority of God's Word to commemorate a day or season and turn it into some kind of religious celebration of this miraculous event, we, as believers of truth, lift our voices in praise and thanksgiving that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son as John 3:16 dictates. (Shame on those even among us who would like to be considered "scholarly" that would remove God's revelation that declares Jesus as His only begotten Son.) We would encourage all men everywhere to turn their attentions to the Biblical record of His birth and believe what is written. Let the true significance of His birth direct us into a recognition of our duty to Him as King of kings and Lord of lords. We would rally all mankind during the Christmas season and all through the year to renew their determination to withstand the blasphemous onslaughts of the skeptic and work that the truth of God's Word will not perish from the hearts and lives of all generations.

Finally, seeing His birth to be miraculous, how many of us see the importance of our relationship with Him? Being God's Son, only through Him can we escape hell and enjoy heaven. Because of His birth and the nature of it along with the manifold evidences given in God's Word concerning Him, we urge one and all to be Christians, seek His forgiveness, become God's spiritual child in His church through faith, repentance, confession of faith that Jesus is God's Son and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins where we reach His saving blood.

† † † † †

How Can We Improve The Home Front

In Second Kings we read of the Shunamite woman. When we meet her she had no child and asked the prophet Elisha for a son. A son was born to her and her husband and there was great rejoicing. But tragedy struck the home. The son became ill and died. The woman again went to the prophet for aid. As Elisha saw her coming he sent his servant to meet her and make this inquiry, *"Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? It is well with the child?"* (Second Kings 4:26). These are questions we need to be asking today about our homes?

In America it is all too obvious that in millions of homes all is not well. While great optimism may be evident at the marriage altar and the doors of a "heaven on earth" seem to await, the new relationship often turns into the gateway of an earthly hell. The forces against the family and sanctity of marriage have taken a deadly toll from society. When you marry the right person there is nothing more wonderful. When you marry the wrong person, often for the wrong reasons, there are few things worse and sorrow follows.

One of four, and in some localities one of two, marriages are ending in divorce. Our divorce rate is higher than in any nation on earth. Hundreds of thousands of youths are torn apart from their parents because of divorce. Millions are living with one parent because of the breakdown of the home. I have never seen nor heard of so much divorce even among members of the church. Furthermore, even where divorce does not occur, many homes are unhappy, maladjusted and miserable with the accompanying unfaithfulness, conflict and frustrated children.

A Corrupt View

Too many have viewed marriage through the eyes of a degenerate Hollywood and the trashy magazines so abundant in our society. These are loveless, selfish, sex-obsessed relationships without the spiritual emphasis and God-given purposes of marriage even being considered, let alone respected. America is bombarded with the advice from the prominent and popular figures who have made miserable failures of their own

marriages. There are even elements that seek the dissolution of marriage and the home, promoting free-love communes and the acceptance of all forms of sexual perversions and violations of the will of God. How much wiser and more successful marriages would be if those involved paid attention to the Designer and Originator of the relationship.

Our homes must be improved if our freedoms and society shall stand. Nineteen of twenty-two civilizations had already crumbled before they reached the low level of home disintegration already evident in our nation. Does this not concern you? The breakdown of the home precedes every fall because the home is to exercise influence in molding the coming generations. When the home is not as it should be, neither will society be as it ought to be. You cannot sow to the flesh and reap life. How can we improve the quality of homes in America, even among those in the church?

A Spiritual Tragedy

Seeing the disasters of failure, we must recognize this failure as a social, but more significantly, a self-imposed spiritual disease and seek the proper medicine. Solutions proposed by men have never succeeded. The corrections needed are sometimes hard to take, but considering the alternatives, we would be wise to hasten to take what we need. So many pulpits bemoan symptoms of home failure but refuse to come to grips with the real problems. Fearful of offending the sinful, the remedy given by the Lord is most often unheard, and even less often heeded. Too much preaching is as one described it, "Yo preaching," meaning a combination of yes and no, take it any way you want. One would think that those who are serious regarding the marital problems and family destructions would want something better than the insipid mouthings of social manipulators, social workers, sociologists of atheistic bent and men who promote their philosophies of "wisdom" rather than the way of divine wisdom.

Marry A Christian

The first suggestion for improvement we make is for Christians to marry those of like precious faith. This is to avoid a multiplicity of problems before they ever arise. So many leave the Lord in favor of their mate when they do not consider the

Lord in selecting their mate. Leaders in every religion warn against mixed marriages because such a divided position on such serious matters inadvertently produces problems. Frankly, it is frustrating and aggravating to have people totally ignore this sound wisdom, then in a few years coming crying to you to help them out of the mess they are in regarding their mate. What can one do when people fly into the face of truth and reason? Indeed, "*the way of the transgressor is hard*," but convincing people of that is not easily done. They have seen their parents do it and somehow, somehow think the division they have witnessed in the home will escape them. They act like stubborn fools and with parental encouragement.

Second Corinthians 6:14-18 teaches against relationships that are incompatible with being a Christian. This is not only applicable to marriage but to all relationships. But listening to this divine teaching would certainly include the closest human relationship in life, that of husband and wife. How can a Christian expect to have Christ in the home when the mate is not even a Christian? The marriage that God approves includes a man, a woman, and Christ. Why do people not consider the Lord when selecting a mate? What of the effect and influence on children that may be born into that home? Where is the common principle and basis of truth upon which decisions shall be made when the Lord is left out? There are fifty times less divorces among those who marry those of like faith than otherwise when both are active and together in the faith.

Women in the Home

I can hear the wail and cry from fools from every quarter when such is even suggested. The point is not taken very well on our disintegrating society but it cannot be repealed and the fruit of its opposite is destroying us. Women must return to putting the home before their personal careers in the world. It is not male chauvinism but the Bible that teaches the woman is to guide the house, love and take care of her family, place her work as a wife and mother before other things (Titus 2:4,5; First Timothy 5:14; Proverbs 31). The "smart alecks" of our time think God is out-of-date. But that simply shows what fools they are. While the world favors monetary gain, recognition, material advancement, these things are sought at the sacrifice of the home. Wives, husbands are children and paying for it in a tragic way. Whether a woman works outside the home is not the full

issue. So often her choice is based on selfishness rather than sacrifice. Is it because of need, or greed, that has taken mothers from their children, brought them into flirtatious encounters in the world, weakened the moral fibre of the home? It is impossible to ignore the increase of juvenile delinquency, child neglect, unattended children, child abuse and related tragedies with the increase of the wives and mothers leaving their primary work as God has assigned it to pursue their selfish and worldly ambitions. Would to God such people could not even physically have children! They do not deserve them. Some even kill them in the womb rather than carry them to birth. What vicious servants of the devil they show themselves to be. With the number one cause of wayward children being parental neglect, how can one successfully argue against God's will? Society may be pushing women into more and more competition with men in areas she does not belong and urging her to abandon the areas where she is especially suited but godly women push back. Whatever be the cause bringing this travesty upon society, nobody who is honest and fair with the facts can argue with the corresponding and disastrous effects on the home.

There is no career for women that surpasses that high calling of guiding the house, homemaker, caring and attending for the family, providing security, love, a sense of belonging and identity that the mother in the home can give and the mother away from the home cannot provide. While the world places glamour, praise, money on the pedestal, this is foreign to God's intent. If the women returned to the home the families would be happier, ample jobs would be available for provisions, lawlessness would decrease, children would be better guided, the nation more stable and the homes far richer than the money brought in at such sacrifice of what really counts. The home's physical gain is often made at the sacrifice of its spirits welfare.

Morality

There must be the return to the Lord's standards of purity. God condemns fornication, adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, and all other forms of illicit sexual conduct. When God says "*thou shalt*" and "*thou shalt not*," there is no room for rationalism to the contrary. The educated fools of our day have led people to believe the "new morality" of old degeneracy is the way and look what it has produced for us all! What many casually call "affairs" are nothing more than sin that damns. The

immorality of America is rampant.

Some years ago I heard a television panel composed of a Protestant clergyman, a Jewish rabbi and a Catholic priest discussing America's morality. They were at odds on many points, but in agreement on one. They all considered the Biblical standard of moral out of fashion for our age. These theological servants of hell were undermining the only thing that kept things decent. They could offer nothing whatever to check the advance of the moral decline and the attendant diseases and evils in its wake. Our universities operated at state expense are too often nothing more than state-financed brothels where the student is taught there is no right and wrong about sexual conduct. Why the fruits of this hideous philosophy does not impress these "wise men" is beyond comprehension. The diseases, malformed children, insecurities, mental breakdown, divorces, etc. that are produced seem to have no place in the concerns of these "experts" as they ponder the theme of morality. This is quite a contrast to the law of our loving Lord.

The law of Christ teaches no sexual union outside of marriage, before marriage, but absolute faithfulness in marriage. Variance from this is sin and God holds the sinner guilty. To use premarital sex as a "proof of love" is to lie with abandon. How could one really love another and encourage and participate with them in that which damns the souls of both of them? That is love? Can you not see how spiritual sick are the minds of many even regarding love? It is not love, but lust. Only the application of God's rule of conduct will deal properly with the moral malady besetting our land.

Strong Fathers

There must be the return to the strong father in the home. The husband is to be the head (Ephesians 5:23). Something is wrong when that is not the case. Either the man is weak and unwilling to assume his responsibilities, which is not manly, or the woman is dominant, unwilling to subject herself to her husband, which is a sorry demonstration of womanhood, but more like a demonstration that all the Jezebels are not dead. Usually, both share in the blame when there is not a strong father in the home.

There is no such thing as the husband being superior or the wife superior. Each is superior in his or her realm. But each is a source of stress and malfunction when outside of their realm.

One of the finest things that was ever said in the Bible of any man was said of Abrahah, Genesis 18:19, *"He will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord."*

Spiritual Emphasis

There must be the spiritual emphasis in the home. It may sound trite but it is true. Families that pray together, usually stay together. This summarizes the usefulness of being spiritually active in the home. One study has shown that ninety-five per cent of the divorces that do occur do so in homes where one or both did not attend worship. In homes of church going families, one of fifty-seven still suffer divorce. But what a difference! That figure doubtless is not so encouraging today as when the survey was made because there has been such an increase in divorces even among church people who have followed the ways of the world more than the way of Christ. We now even have a diluge of false doctrines trying to accomodate adultery and sinful so-called marriages so people can "do their own thing" and still be considered respectable, even among brethren. The Lord's wrath shall ultimately be poured out on such teachers and those who follow their sinister doctrines. Such false teaching only encourages more home destruction.

A person has no more right to destroy the home than he does to destroy the church, assuming the home is acceptable to God. They both have come from the mind of God. But to leave God out of the home is cut away the very heart of it. A home that fails to honor God, His Son, His church, His Word, can never expect to reap the rich reward of spiritual success God intends. The home is even a greater spiritual influence, especially on the young, than the church. The home can support or tear down the efforts made by the church regarding spiritual matters. The home, the spring from which all else comes, when polluted, pollutes everything else. To make matters better, we must concentrate on the improvement of the spring.

We cannot turn our backs on these principles and expect improvement. If we will give heed to them, teach them, insist upon them among brethren, we shall be blessed. The place to begin is your home, my home, and try to influence all homes in God's direction.

† † † † †

Paul Was Mistreated

While reading from Acts recently I noticed something I had never seen before. It is not a major item but interesting to me nonetheless. When Paul was seized in Jerusalem the chief captain had to rush in and take Paul lest the crowd kill him (Acts 21). The captain's name was Lysias (Acts 24:22). Paul was allowed to speak to the crowd but it only made matters worse. Eventually he was taken to Caesarea before Felix. Charges were made but Felix made no decision, explaining he would wait until Lysias could come down and testify. Did I miss something? He never came.



JAMES W. BOYD

For two years Felix kept Paul as a prisoner, but Lysias never testified about the case of Paul. It was a short distance from Jerusalem to the court but he never came. Why was Lysias never brought to testify?

The answer lies in Acts 24:26 that tells of Felix's desire for a bribe from Paul, which he never received. There seems to never have been any intention of hearing additional testimony about Paul. So there Paul remained, unconvicted, but held nonetheless to satisfy the greedy goals of an evil man. He suffered much for the cause of Christ.

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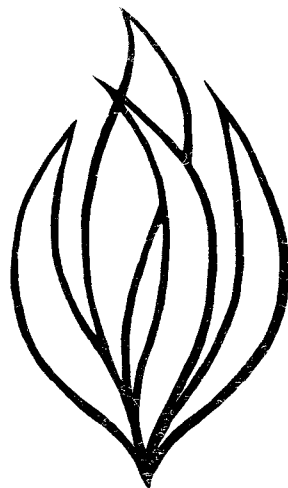
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A Burning Fire



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

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VOLUME X

James W. Boyd

NUMBER 12

Paul Writes Colosse About Christ

Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, addressed the Epistle of Colossians to his brethren in Christ, mentioning at the first that God was the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ and that he was thankful for their faith in Christ. But who is this Christ? What kind of person is He? What can be known concerning Him? Paul spends many words in this letter telling his brethren more about Christ, possibly reminding them of many things they already knew, refreshing their minds, and all the while giving additional food, spiritual meat, whereby they might grow in Christ.

Although Jesus came to this earth nearly two thousand years ago to save the world, much of the world today knows little or nothing about Him. Many who profess to be Christians do not fully appreciate His greatness because their knowledge of Him is so limited. Christ is the theme of the Bible; the very center of it, the central personality in it, the One through whom the very purposes of God's revelation to mankind is accomplished. All that came before Him pointed to Him and all that has followed after Him points back to Him.

He Preached Christ

Paul said He preached Christ and Him crucified (First Corinthians 1:23; 2:2). Second Corinthians 4:5, *"For we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord."* When Philip went to Samaria and when he preached to the Ethiopian, his message was Christ and His kingdom (Acts 8:5,35). Christ was the message of the first century and He is the needed message in our century. The only reliable source of information we have concerning Him is from the inspired Word of God, the Bible. Let us learn certain truths about Christ from various passages written by Paul in the first two chapters of the book of Colossians.

King

1:13, *"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."* By this Paul affirms Jesus as King over His kingdom. The Colossian

brethren were in that kingdom. They entered into it by being “translated,” or changed, converted to Christ. They had left the darkness of sin and entered into the kingdom of light.

From Paul’s comment I can know that Jesus is King now, and that His kingdom exists now and people can be citizens in it now. This, by itself, is a death blow to the false doctrine of premillennialism.

Redeemer

“In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins.” To redeem means to buy back. We sell our souls to Satan by sinning, and Jesus Christ has paid the ransom price by which we can be bought back and returned to God. We are bought and redeemed by His blood (First Peter 1:18,19; Acts 20:28; Matthew 20:28). *“Without shedding of blood is no remission.”* (Hebrews 10:22). Animal sacrifices would not suffice (Hebrews 10:4). Jesus bought us back by His own blood (Hebrews 9:12). As Paul wrote in Ephesians 1:7, *“In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins...”*

Head

“And he is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.” Christ is head of the body, the church. None surpasses Him in rank and authority nor is even equal or shares His supreme authority except as He has delegated it to be used. All things must meet His approval and His will is the standard of measure for the church. He is the final court.

Such designations as king, head, preeminent one, effectively elevates Christ to the place of dominion and superiority. Saying He is the *“first born of all creation”* does not mean Christ is a created being even though He took on the form of man by being born of woman. This has reference to the rank of supremacy that belongs to the firstborn. The firstborn of an Israelite family occupied a special priority and position above his brothers and sisters, assuming the headship of the family in the event of the death of the father. So Jesus is superior to all that has been created. He is second to none.

Reconciler

Right along the same line as a Redeemer, consider 1:20-22. *"And, having made peace through the blood of His cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated, and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight."* Mankind is spiritually dead in sin because of his transgressions of God's law (First John 3:4). In that state he is bound for the eternal hell. In order to have eternal life in heaven mankind must be forgiven of sin. Christ, our Redeemer, is peacemaker between God and man, making it possible for man to partake of this much-needed forgiveness whereby man can have life. This was accomplished only because God provided the way of salvation that includes the death of His Son on the cross.

Deity and Humanity

"Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature." (Colossians 1:15). John 14:9 reads, *"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father..."* It is not that Christ and the Father are the same person, but that there is total unity between them as members of the Godhead. While Deity is Spirit (John 4:24), Jesus took on the form of humanity (Philippians 2:8; John 1:1,14). He is the One who is *"the express image of his person."* (Hebrews 1:3). His name, Emmanuel, means *"God with us"* (Matthew 1:23). John wrote, First John 2:23, *"Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father; He that confesseth the Son hath the Father also."* To not give honor to Christ renders it impossible to honor the Father (John 5:23). The Deity and humanity of Christ are declared.

Paul's identification of Christ as the image of the invisible God makes it plain that Jesus was both Deity and humanity. While some admit to the reality of His humanity, they deny His Deity. But the same Word that informs us of the one fact also tells us of the other. This being true, Christ is not with whom to trifle, nor can there be obedience to Christ nor can one be correctly baptized *"in the name of Christ"* who denies the very nature and person of Jesus the Christ. Rather, He is deserving of all the praise, honor, glory and respect we can give Him and we must be submissive to Him.

Creator

1:16,17, *"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist."*

This, like other passages mentioned, expresses the eternal nature and Deity of Christ. Christ is presented as Creator of the physical world as is expressed in John one. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit were all involved in bringing the world into existence. Genesis 1:1, *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."* The word "God" is the plural word Elohim which denotes the plurality of person of the Godhead at the very start of revelation. Hebrews 1:1,2 affirms the same truth of His presence at creation and participation in it. He *"upholds all things,"* holds all things together, is the Sustainer of the world.

Unmistakenly, He announced Himself and His pre-existence before His birth in Bethlehem when He said, John 5:58, *"I say unto you, before Abraham was born, I am."* It is expressly stated here, like in John 1:1-3, *"He is before all things."* Revelation 22:13 echoes Paul's declarations about Christ when Christ calls Himself the Alpha and Omega, the first and last, the beginning and end. There could hardly be stronger and more definite words written by anyone affirming His eternal nature and Deity than what Paul has written and which is corroborated with many other New Testament scriptures.

Rank

1:18, again He is called the *"firstborn from the dead."* We have noted how this affirms His unsurpassed rank and position. But He was not the first to die, nor the first to be raised from the dead. But we serve a living Lord, not a dead martyr or past hero. He died, but He lives (Hebrews 7:25). He was the first to die to never die again. Because of Him all can live, even with God. Christ is the firstfruits of the dead, being the first to die and live again but to die no more (First Corinthians 15:21-23). Whether we be living or have already died physically at the time of His return, we shall live with Him if we be found faithful in Him (First Thessalonians 4:13-18).

There are several other passages where Paul shows the

wholeness, completeness and all-sufficiency of Christ, a fact too often not appreciated. 1:19, *"...in him should all fulness dwell."* 2:3, *"In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."* 2:9, *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."* 2:10, *"And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power."*

Sufficiency

Such words as quoted leave no doubt as to the all-sufficiency of Christ. As He stated before His ascension, all authority and power belongs to Him (Matthew 28:18). All we must know, all we must do, all we must be to be pleasing to God is to be found in Christ. Only in Him is there to be found the wholeness and completeness that mankind lacks. Fulness is not found in worldly living, following the flesh or the wisdom and doctrines of men. Nor shall the discoveries of science, however valuable to humanity, can man be whole. The triumphs of the physical cannot provide the salvation of the spiritual. Fulness is in Christ, the all-sufficient One.

Little wonder that Paul labored for Him, lived for Him, urged others to do likewise. We wonder why all people, coming to this knowledge of Him, do not come to Him with thanksgiving, rendering obedience to the gospel, and living their lives in Christ. After all, this is what really matters.

† † † † †

Release From Law

Galatians 2:16, *"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."*

Romans 7:6, *"But now we are delivered from the law..."*

Romans 3:28, *"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."*

When we take note of the way some are using, rather misusing, some of these verses we are prompted to ask, "From

what law are we delivered? What is the relationship between law and salvation through Christ?"

Release From All Law?

We hear some contend if one has faith he is free from all law, bound by nothing, saved by grace alone, and enjoys total and absolute freedom in Christ. He is subject only to what he thinks is right, guided by his feelings, using his own will and conscience as the standard by which to measure. Is this the meaning of being delivered from law of these verses?

We quickly observe if every person were permitted to be a law unto himself, being governed only by what he wants, likes and feels is right, there being no absolute right or wrong except as he thinks it within his own heart, there would be as many governments as people and nothing but anarchy, chaos, confusion and intolerable existence would reign.

Some say we are free and have used this to justify the doctrine of the so-called "new morality" which challenges opposition to adultery, fornication, or any other conduct previously considered immoral. The Harvard Divinity School has specialized in promoting the idea that we are delivered from law, meaning all law. The University of Princeton teaches that a list of "cans" and "cannots" has no meaning. All kinds of sexual intimacies are justified on the basis that we are not under law, meaning no law.

The Episcopal Theological School contends, "No sexual relationship should be absolutely condemned, but one enters into every decision making moment armed with all the wisdom of culture but preaped in one's freedom to suspend and violate any rule." How can they say this? They say we are delivered from law, law under Christ, and then pronounce this law of their own. This is the message of many denominational groups and their anti-Christ clergymen, and some of our own brethren are partaking of the same kind of moral garbage.

But alongside the teaching that we are saved by grace and grace alone, we are even hearing misguided and liberal brethren teaching that there is no law under the system of Christ because we are delivered from law. They do not go quite as far, yet, as do denominational heretics in contending you are permitted to do whatever you wish and whatever you think right in everything, but their inconsistency lies in the inability of their position to say anything is wrong. If there is no law to which we

are subject, who can say anything is wrong? To say something is wrong is to admit there is a law. And just who ordained the law that there is no law whatever?

Furthermore, in recent years we hear some of our "Christian college trained preachers" preaching how some of God's laws are essential to obey and others, though important, are not essential and leave room for discussion whether we must obey them or not. While thinking people realize this is a most arrogant and presumptuous position for any human being to take toward any command of God, many unsuspecting youths are being misled by it. It is another throw-off from the false doctrine that we are delivered from all law. But we are forced to ask those who hold such views just where they learned the law that says some divine law is essential and must be obeyed and other divine law (commands) are optional? Who made that law? We decry and denounce the attitude, especially in matters of the soul, that would teach people that submitting to God's law is to deny freedom in faith.

Nothing New

This is not a novel doctrine. Denominationalists have been preaching and practicing optional obedience throughout their histories. The permission to do what you like and all will be well anyway as long as you are honest and sincere has not characterized those who have sought to restore New Testament Christianity, but we hear it among so-called brethren more and more. I say "so-called" because they are no longer faithful in Christ because they are no longer loyal to His doctrine.

Faith and Law

Scripture does not teach that faith nullifies all law. Romans 3:31, "*Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.*" Paul wrote of the "*law of Christ.*" (Galatians 6:2). He taught how the Mosaic Law could not free us from the law of sin and death but that the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus can and does (Romans 8:2,3). There is a law in which he delighted and that was "*the law of God after the inward man.*" (Romans 7:22). There is the "*law of faith.*" (Romans 3:27), which is the "*perfect law of liberty.*" (James 1:25). Only a rebel against God would contend we are free from all law. Is it not significant that the very epistle that emphasizes

grace and faith as much or more than any other epistle (Romans) also necessitates conformity to law? Why should we conclude there is an incompatibility between them except we no longer love the truth?

Romans, Galatians and Hebrews compares and contrasts the law God gave under and through Moses with the faith of Christ. The Mosaic Law was a law of works. Salvation was based on man's merit for keeping the law. Of course, he could not keep the law perfectly and the Mosaic law made no provision for the forgiveness of sins except in prospect through Christ. But forgiveness is offered under the faith of Christ on the basis of the merit of the blood of God's Son. The faith of Christ delivers man from the Mosaic Law and from the concept of salvation by man's meritorious works. But the faith of Christ does deliver us from the law of sin and death, but not all law. Just what does one think we must obey except it be God's law? Here is where the problem lies. Some think we do not have to obey God at all.

Not All Law

The Mosaic law was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). Romans 7:1-4 teaches the Christian is married, not to Moses' law, but to another who is the resurrected Christ. The old law was not repudiated nor destroyed (Matthew 5:17,18), but fulfilled in and by Christ (Luke 24:27). Rather than destroying the old law, the faith of Christ showed the law to be from God (Romans 3:31; Galatians 3:23-25).

But even a small amount of honest thinking will demand we reject the doctrine that we are free from all law. Are we made free from the laws of nature? Is it not still true that when one jumps from the top of a building he falls, possibly to his death, being pulled down by gravity? Have we rejected the law of gravity? Can one place his hand on a hot stove and the flesh not be burned, or does the law of nature still operate in this matter? Do not try it! Are we not also subject to the law of sowing and reaping, not only in the material realm, but also the spiritual? (Galatians 6:7,8). Whether we be ignorant of the laws of nature or not, negligent toward them or unintentionally violate them, when we do transgress them we shall bear the consequences. Nobody of good sense argue otherwise.

Nor are we released from civil law. Civil disobedience has become popular against the laws people do not happen to like. But the Christian realizes his duty to obey the laws of the land

(Romans 13:1-6; First Peter 2:13,14) so long as they do not necessitate a violation of the law of God (Acts 5:29). Do you think you can run roughshod over civil law on the basis that you are now under the grace of Christ? To suggest such a thing exposes the foolishness that we free from all law.

The faith of Christ does not release us from God's moral laws, although some act like it. Man has lived subject to God's moral standards since Eden. Both the Mosaic Law and the faith of Christ contain an abundance of moral teaching. It is the height of blasphemy to hear some abuse and misuse Scripture to justify immoral conduct.

We have already mentioned that the faith of Christ releases us from the Mosaic Law. The faith of Christ releases us also from the law that says, "You sin; you die." This is the law of sin and death. We are made free from spiritual bondage by obedience to the truth of Christ (John 8:32; Romans 6:16-18).

Bound by Law

But rather than being delivered from all law we, as children of God, are bound to the law of faith (Romans 3:27). Because salvation is by the merit of Christ no man has any reason for boastfulness and pride. But to declare that we are free from all law is to dismiss the authority of divine command and release man from the necessity to obey God. Such false doctrine destroys the entire Scriptural teaching concerning obedience and actually turns man loose to "do his own thing" and that with God's approval. Who could possibly claim respect for Scripture and contend for such heresy?

Peter warns of those who bring damnable heresies into our midst. Nothing is more contemptible than doctrines that would dismiss the authority of God and necessity of man to obey Him. It matters not whether one is a modernist of the denominational seminaries and clergy, or a self-proclaimed scholar among our own brethren who is misguided and digressive because he has been drinking from the pitchers of error, to teach people the doctrine of deliverance from all law because of the grace of Christ is damnable heresy, plain and simple. What right does some professor or preacher at some large, rich church have to declare doctrines so blatantly and arrogantly in violation of plain truth? Just who do these promoters of apostasy think they are? Let us not be guilty of damning our own souls by teaching such religious trash, or being led astray by the egotistical "wise men"

among us who would persuade us to accept their error.

But thanks be to God we can be free from sin and free from the wages of sin and free from the law of sin and death by the grace of God and our obedience to His law! Even when we obey we have not earned our salvation, but have only accepted His gift by doing as He commands we must do to accept it.

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Luke 12:1-7

It is not only interesting but very profitable to select a passage of Scripture, read it, study it, meditate upon it and learn the many true and useful lessons it reveals from heaven. We wish to consider the following passage:

"In the meantime, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, inso-much that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops. And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him. Are not five sparrows sold for a farthing, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are numbered. Fear not, therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows."

Multitudes

It was characteristic of the ministry of Jesus that He was followed by huge multitudes of people, sometimes packed so

closely that they were virtually standing on each other. It is wonderful to recall that people desired to hear the words of the Savior that much. How fine it would be if such was the existing attitude of the multitudes of people today. But it is seldom that way. It is not because people shun crowds. Consider the athletic events, even the revelry of wild music concerts. People will come to hear some worldly celebrity, an entertainer, even evil people. How they push and shove with delight to do their shopping, even in the worst kind of weather. But our world does not crowd to hear the gospel message, the only message of eternal value. So few, relatively, have any interest in the things of God and the soul of man, except some worldly famous false teachers, like the pope, who manage to draw great numbers. Most consider it an imposition to come to a comfortable building, heated or cooled as the need may require, to hear the Word of God.

Internal Indifference

Actually it is not too surprising that the world is indifferent when even professed Christians often choose to abstain from worshipping God and feeding upon His Word. It sounds fantastic and unreal, but just consider the ways of many in the church who are irregular in this duty. You do not have to go far to locate "mission fields." Few church buildings that teach the truth and stand for sound doctrine are overcrowded. Sometimes crowds may enlarge during the Christmas and Easter seasons, but this is more evidence of "playing church" than serving God.

The numerical strength of a congregation is most often calculated on the Sunday morning worship attendance figure. I suggest this is misleading. That usually does not reflect the spiritual strength and interest of the church, but an inflated and deceptive evaluation. It probably does not indicate the number of saved at that place. To really see the size of a congregation we best consider the attendance at Bible study, or Sunday evening, or even mid-week assemblies and gospel meetings. A congregation is far stronger with an attendance of one hundred Sunday morning, Bible study, Sunday night and mid-week assembly than one that is five hundred Sunday morning, two fifty for Bible study, two hundred Sunday evening and one hundred at mid-week. As we think along these lines we might ask ourselves if we really contribute to the strength or weakness of the congregation we attend! The evidence is that many

brethren have been innoculated with Christianity just enough to not really have it at all.

Leaven of Hypocrisy

Christ warned His hearers to beware of the characteristic of the Pharisees which was hypocrisy. Leaven is used in making bread, producing fermentation and gradually permeating the entire mass of dough with a transforming influence. Jesus teaches that the influence of the Pharisees is like leaven because they pretended to be what they were not. They were fakes and deceivers who liked to leave the impression of being religious and being followers of God but actually were not.

Hypocrisy does more harm to the church than all the outside forces of antagonism can muster. The outsiders can sometimes cause trouble but the hypocrite causes strife, division, reproach, disgrace, misrepresentation of Christ and makes outsiders think everyone in the church is that way.

Paul wrote, First Corinthians 5:6,7, *"Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened."* Very likely many members of the church think that token service is sufficient because they are influenced by Pharisaic leaven.

Who is Deceived?

In verses two and three Jesus shows the hypocrite is actually the one who is deceived. Hypocrisy is self-deception. One thinks himself successful in his pretense until he is finally awakened to see what he really is and the result of his conduct is disastrous. God knows the words and deeds of us all even when other people do not. Each shall give an account before God for what we say and do in life (Second Corinthians 5:10). God even knows the contents of the heart (Acts 1:24; First Corinthians 4:5). People cannot deceive God (Galatians 6:7,8). As Moses warned some of his fellows, *"Be sure your sins will find you out."* (Numbers 32:23). This ought to motivate us to be what we propose to be and stand for what we say, really doing what we contend ought to be done.

Divine Advice

Jesus gave timely advice to His followers in verses four and five. This is of particular value to the Christian who stands in constant danger and persecution. We are subjected to intimidation and humiliation. Some are subjected to threats, harassments, even torture and death. Jesus taught us not to fear even martyrdom. The worst an enemy can do is take your physical life. This is not a minor matter, to be sure, but after that he can do no more. This body is not the totality of man anyway. Destruction of this body and physical life does not destroy the person. The early Christians were martyred by the thousands rather than surrender their convictions. They were able to face death because a dead body does not mean a dead soul. What a contrast between those who are often unfaithful, lukewarm, compromising and afraid and those who are willing to give all, even this life, to be faithful to Christ!

False Security

Sometimes we may think ourselves safe if we are absent from physical threats. But that may be the gravest danger. We will not be as alert and attentive, failing to demand of ourselves what is expected, becoming complacent, lax, confusing physical safety with spiritual welfare. Those of us living in America are subject to this subtle danger because we live in a land of religious freedom where we are protected by the civil powers to worship as we decide. We live in a land of relative abundance materially, even with luxuries and blessings that most people of the world never even can consider.

It has historically been true that nations in prosperity often turn away from the source of their blessings. Israel, in their strength physically and materially, would often depart from God. In their dire needs they would usually be the strongest spiritually. Little wonder that the poor, humble and weak according to the measures of this world prove to be the most devout servants of God.

Who to Fear

While we ought not fear those who can harm us physically or take away our material goods, there is One whom we should fear. He can destroy spiritually. This is usually thought to refer to God Himself who is a God of justice, wrath, vengeance and has the power to condemn. Hebrews 10:31, *"It is a fearful thing to*

fall into the hands of the living God.” God must be revered for judgment’s sake as well as His love and majesty. We should never fear the displeasure of other people more than the displeasure of God. As one preacher friend stated to me, “I had rather die without a friend on earth and be right with God than have all the friends of the world and be separated from God.”

We think we should also fear Satan as he goes about seeking whom he may devour. We should be aware of his agents who would provoke us to say, do or think sinful things that can cause our spiritual doom. Good men and good causes have always had evil opponents.

While the primary reference is to fear God because He has charge of the soul and His will governs its disposition, Jesus warns us of spiritual danger lurking around us and that we must be on guard for the soul’s welfare.

God is the Answer

Verses six and seven teach us that God is mindful of His children. This is a blessed thought! We sing a song that confesses, “The Lord has been mindful of me.” Of all the millions upon millions of people for whom He cares, still the Lord is mindful of me. Such a thought is comforting and encouraging as well as sobering. It strengthens us, giving hope, peace and assurance with the knowledge that someday, in God’s providence and scheme of things, we shall have the eternal heaven that is prepared for the faithful. For this blessing we praise His excellent name!

Who cannot enjoy and profit from consideration of such matchless spiritual teaching as was done by our Master, here and elsewhere? We must learn and then must live accordingly.

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“A Burning Fire is one of my greatest reading enjoyments. The sermons in these small books are among the very best. I thank you for including me on your mailing list. I pray that God will continue blessing you in your work and efforts.”

As has been expressed by me many times, but always with utmost sincerity, I deeply appreciate these comments from readers. It makes me realize the need and makes me grateful I can do something positive and constructive toward the spiritual welfare of others.

JWB

Is God Dead?

It has been said, "We must recognize that the death of God is a historical event. God has died in our time, in our history, in our existence." Another said, "God is dead, and the church is his tombstone."

Such statements are so irreverent and blasphemous that we find it repugnant to quote them even to introduce the lesson. Yet, this is the claim of many prominent people, even religious leaders, who have received widespread publicity and recognition as they spew forth their mockery of truth, threatening the faith of many, especially the young who have not grounded themselves in truth, and enlarging the influence of atheism.

The Fool

Many have foolishly equated scholarship with liberalism and the denial of God. But we agree with David when he said, "*The fool hath said in his heart there is no God.*" Paul wrote about people who professed themselves to be wise but were fools (Romans 1:22. I have known some of these "educated" fools.

The obituary column is not where one might expect to find the name of God. Some say the idea is so foolish that we need not even talk about it. We know that God can take care of Himself and will survive these attacks as He always has. It is not a matter of God's survival but our own and those around us. If one is swayed by this false contention he is marching toward hell. We have a duty to grant everybody opportunity to know better and to hear the evidence on behalf of truth.

Not a New Doctrine

Such a doctrine that God is dead is not new, having been advanced by Nietzsche, a nineteenth century philosopher, who tried to dispose of God. It is just another form of vice and sophisticated infidelity with all of its attendant evils. What is new about it is that it is declared by some who profess to be "Christians." One leading advocate a few years ago of this heresy was a professor in a Methodist school, Emory University, that raised twenty-five million dollars as a "Christian" school. But with his teaching he was not rebuked but retained.

Heresy is not new to denominationalism as it attempts to retain the name "Christian" while denying Him and His teaching. They have done this to baptism, the Lord's Supper, the church, morality, just about anything and everything being replaced with the doctrines of the "wise" men of "scholarship." If anyone wonders why we should oppose denominationalism, just look at what denominationalists say and those who care for the teaching of the Bible will know it must be opposed.

What They Really Mean

What do these people really mean by the contention that God is dead? Let us also learn what they do not mean. They do not mean that man has lost sight of God. With this we could agree. They do not mean that many no longer take the existence of God seriously. Again, we are sad to note this is true and we agree. They do not mean that God's influence in many lives has diminished. Everyone can see that.

They say God is dead only to make way for a new history, a new humanity, new morality. Just as Satan must be defeated before the kingdom of God can advance, to them God must die before the new order can dawn. It is a promotion of the idea that the concept of God is merely the invention of man who could not explain things otherwise and it is now outdated and irrelevant since man has become so smart that everything can be explained by science and there is no need for God. They do not believe God really ever lived except in the mind of man. Man created God, not God created man.

Whereas God places emphasis on this life AND the next, they contend that God is dead and now we can concentrate only on this life, the here and now, work for social, economic and political solutions to the ills of mankind to the exclusion of any life beyond this one. In other words, God has died because man no longer finds Him useful nor to his liking.

The Religion of Science

The false doctrine contends that science has the answer to every question, having disproved the Bible, the supernatural, and now we have a logical and scientific answer for every question and problem. Can anyone of intelligence really believe that science has answered everything and solved all the problems? The doctrine simply tries to bury God and put some

self-proclaimed “wise” man in His place. It is another futile attempt by men to remove themselves from responsibility and accountability to a higher power than themselves. All gods have not died because many men have become their own gods.

They teach that God’s will is not relevant to our time. The truth is that God’s will is unknown and untried. The world generally is ignorant of God and His Word. This is the fault of those of us who serve Him and who have failed to get the message to the world. One would do well to pause here and read Romans 1:18-32, noting how these characteristics of people who cast off God are so similar, often identical, to characteristics of our own day and age. We dare not confuse the issue. God is not dead simply because some smart-aleck wishes He was. Man is the one who is dead in sin even as he liveth.

Many want a new history, new order, new humanity, new morality, new standards and new gods rather than the God who lives. One of the biggest lies propagated in our day is that science has disproven the Bible and the supernatural. There is not one proven scientific fact that must be denied in order to believe the Bible. Nothing has proven to be more unstable and ever-changing than the shifting positions of science. Even with all its accomplishments, which are legion and remarkable and for which we are grateful, it is incapable of dealing with spiritual matters. Let none be deceived into thinking that science is the answer to the ethical, moral and religious issues of mankind. Furthermore, there is a growing number of competent scientists who are quick to say this very same thing.

Gross Inconsistency

Incredible and inconsistent as it is, some claim to follow Christ but deny He is the Son of God, denying His teaching, and assigning Him as nothing more than an exceptional man and great teacher. They will be heard to say that God is dead but not Jesus. It is intellectually dishonest to try to separate Jesus and the Father. First John 2:23, *“Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father; but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.”* John 14:9, Jesus said, *“He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.”* Some make the hideous mistake to attempt to take the respected name of Jesus Christ and misuse Him to advance their false doctrines. Such is dishonest. But dishonesty is a trait of those who deny God.

Where is the evidence that God is dead? They do not mean

God is merely disbelieved or lost His influence, but is non-existent. Seeing the lack of godliness in the world they assume God has died, never was, not understanding that man is the one who has died in sin. God is not dead simply because some know Him not. He is not dead because some would like to put Him in a test tube and weigh and analyze Him as they would some material substance but cannot because God is Spirit. Man's unwillingness to conform to God's teaching and travel his own deceptive road is no basis to conclude God is dead.

If It Were True

The implications of such a contention are disastrous. If God is dead, non-existent, the Bible is false; there is no right or wrong; there is nothing to prayer; no immorality; no immorality; no standard or sin or salvation; no reason for life; no hope, law, authority, justice or anything else. Nothing is of any value to mankind whatsoever.

Notice the Scripture. Matthew 16:16, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" God lives. Matthew 22:32 asserts that God is the God of the living, not the dead. How could God be the God of the living if He is dead Himself? Paul said the brethren in Thessalonica had "*turned from idols to serve the living and true God.*" (First Thessalonians 1:9). John 16:67 teaches that Christ lives and we shall live by Christ, but Christ said, "*I live by the Father.*" So the Father must live. Romans 16:26 calls God eternal. The Old Testament is replete with passages that teach the living God. (Psalm 9:7; 41:13; 92:8; 93:2; Jeremiah 10:10 and others.

Heresy

The God-is-dead heresy is stopped in its tracks when God said, "*I am that I am.*" God is and shall forever be. His very name, Jehovah, means the eternal and existing One.

Paul preached to a group of skeptical intellectuals in Athens at Mars Hill as is recorded in Acts 17:24-31. He said God lives; He is near us; He made us; He shall judge us; He has ordained Christ His Son as our Savior; and we can live eternally with Jehovah provided we come to Him through His Son. "*No man cometh to the Father but by me.*" (John 14:6).

Doctor Altizer of Emory University, an advocate of the

God-is-dead doctrine was challenged to honorable and public debate by several scholarly and faithful brethren. At first he accepted, but later declined without explanation. What is dead is the false and blasphemous doctrine that he and other unbelievers propagate.

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What Jesus Said About Himself

The central person of the Bible is Jesus Christ. Everything that occurred before His birth pointed toward Him and that which has transpired after His ascension points back to Him. Many had much to say concerning Him. The Old Testament prophets foretold of Him; John the Baptist prepared the way for His coming; the apostles and early evangelists preached Christ and Him crucified. But what did Jesus say of Himself and what did He acknowledge regarding His identity?

We do not suggest that what He said is more important than what inspired writers of the Bible have testified because their testimony and the word of Jesus came from the same divine source. But it is interesting to learn how the Lord Jesus presented Himself to the world. From what He has said we get a better understanding of His nature.

Son of God; Son of Man

Jesus referred to Himself as the “*Son of God*” and also the “*Son of man*.” Some have counted and say that Jesus called Himself the “*Son of man*” eighty-one times; more than any other single designation. Matthew 16:13 is one example, “*Who do men say that I the Son of man am?*” By this designation He confesses His humanity and identifies Himself with the human family by showing He understands and sympathizes with the life of a human being. He was born of woman (Galatians 4:4); fashioned as a man (Philippians 2:8); was not ashamed to call other people His brethren (Hebrews 2:11); was also a partaker of flesh and blood (Hebrews 2:14); “*for verily he took not on*

him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham" (Hebrews 2:16).

He readily accepted the designation of the "Son of God." Twice the Father is recorded to have confessed Him as His Son (Matthew 3:17; 17:5). After Jesus had called Himself the Son of man He accepted Peter's confession that He was the Son of God (Matthew 16:16). When standing before His accusers and judges He was asked, "*Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am.*" (Mark 14:61,62). A similar admission was made before Pilate (Matthew 27:11,12). Accepting this identification caused some of His enemies to accuse Him of blasphemy. But it is evident that Jesus recognized Himself as God's only begotten Son.

Mediator

Because Jesus was both humanity and Deity He became the one mediator between God and man (First Timothy 2:5) and qualified to be our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14). By this dual nature He became the only avenue of approach to God (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). His very name, Emmanuel, means "*God with us.*" (Matthew 1:23). John wrote, 1:14, "*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, [and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father], full of grace and truth.*"

Preacher

Jesus regarded Himself as a preacher. It has been said, "God had but one Son and He was a preacher." Mark 1:33, "*And he said unto them, Let us go into the next town, that I may preach there also: for therefore came I forth.*"

A preacher is a herald, a proclaimer of a message. Jesus preached a message of authority. Mark 1:22, "*And they were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes.*"

He, like all preachers, told a message of glad tidings. Romans 10:15, "*And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things.*" The Lord Jesus came into the world with an announcement from God; a truth never before heard in its fulness; that salvation was provided and fellowship between humanity and Deity was

offered. Like some who went to seize Him but heard Him preach confessed, *"Never man spake like this man."* (John 7:26. There never has been a greater preacher.

Yes, there had been great preachers prior to Christ. There was Noah, a preacher of righteousness. There was Jonah who was most effective at Nineveh. Even Solomon was known for his wisdom and his fame was worldwide. But the greatness of Jesus surpassed them. Matthew 12: 41,42, *"The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here."*

Jesus was a great preacher, not only because of who He was, but also because of the message He preached. His message was a divinely given proclamation from God to man. John 17:16, *"Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me."* Again, John 8:26, *"I have many things to say and to judge of you; but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him."* John 8:28, *"...but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things."* John 12:50, *"...whatsoever I speak therefore, even as the Father said unto me, so I speak."* He did not preach human opinions, philosophies, theories, airing doubts, weaving fine-spun and fanciful imaginary theologies. He proclaimed God's indisputable, unanswerable and eternal truth, insisting that people hear and heed it.

He Taught the Kingdom

Among the subjects He taught was His kingdom. Matthew 4:23, *"And Jesus went about all Galilee... preaching the gospel of the kingdom."* The kingdom of God, which is the church, is God's society of people on earth who have been washed clean by the blood of the Lamb. Jesus summoned people to accept God's will and citizens in God's spiritual kingdom wherein is salvation. Through Christ God's love was reaching out to recover the lost, hopeless, helpless, doomed and damned human race. Even as He warned of God's wrath against sin and the evildoer, He told of God's offer to pardon all who came to Him through Christ.

He Preached Repentance

The preaching of Christ also included the command to repent. He said, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" (Matthew 4:17). "*Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.*" (Luke 13:3). He preached baptism in order to be saved. Both faith and baptism were mentioned as conditions for salvation in Mark 16:16.

He Preached About Man

The great preaching of this great Preacher included divine truth regarding man's lost condition, His own mission to this world to save, the coming of God's kingdom, God's love, God's gift of His Son, God's gift of salvation and God's terms for pardon. He also preached of God's wrath against evil and His warnings to the disobedient.

Prophet and Teacher

Jesus also regarded Himself as a prophet. Speaking of Himself He said, Matthew 13:57, "*A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house.*" A prophet is both a foreteller and a forthteller. He predicts and also proclaims. He is one who is very close to God, within the counsels of God, one to whom the mind of God has been revealed, and one who speaks for God.

Jesus considered Himself a teacher, as did most of those who were associated with Him. He often accepted the address of "*Rabbi,*" which means a great one or an exalted teacher. Such a term was usually reserved by the Jews for the wisest and most prominent teachers among them. Six times Jesus is called by this word, sometimes translated Master. It is used with reference to one who leads others in the paths of virtue and righteousness; one who is in charge and has authority to guide.

More than sixty other times Jesus is called a teacher or said to be teaching. All kinds of people called Him a teacher, such as His own disciples, friends, foes, Pharisees, Saducees, people who sought His help as well as those who wanted to learn truth.

Jesus taught in all kinds of places and circumstances, such as the temple, synagogues, in the cities, villages, on the open way, by the seaside, from a boat, around a table, in a mountain, on the streets and in an upper room. When you study the life of

Jesus you are left with the impression that more people would have recognized Him by the term, Teacher, than probably any other designation. When the disciples were sent to prepare for the last Passover, they were told to simply say, "*The Master [Teacher]saith...*" (Matthew 26:18), and that would suffice to identify who wanted the room.

There are additional ways that Jesus identified Himself or allowed Himself to be identified, but this will be sufficient to provoke within us an enlarged respect for Him, which is our goal for such a study. He recognized that He was human and divine, the Son of God and the Son of man. He was a preacher of God's will, prophet and teacher, and what is so important to us all, our Mediator and High Priest.

What Jesus knew of Himself is important. But it is important we also recognize Him for who He really is. The question was once asked, "*What think ye of Christ?*" Again it was asked, "*Who do men say that I, the Son of man, am?*" Each of us must inquire concerning our own regard of Jesus. Whether we are saved or shall remain among the lost depends on how we consider Him, not just what He knew of Himself. Once recognizing that His identifications of Himself are true, we must believe in Him, and obey Him in repentance, confession of faith in Him and baptism into Him for the remission of sins.

† † † † †

More Comments Received

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"Please keep sending me **A Burning Fire**. It is of great benefit to me."

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"I wish the whole world could read your publication."

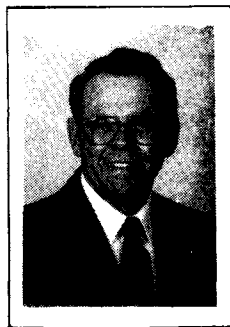
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Cornelius and the Holy Spirit

The Holy Ghost fell on Coernelius and his house as Peter began to preach (Acts 10:44; 11:15). It was a direct operation of the Holy Spirit and enabled them to speak with tongues (languages) and magnify God. Those who had come with Peter were astonished that such would occur, but were then convinced that the gospel was for the Gentiles as well as Jews , and the report of it served that purpose (Acts 11:18). It was not to save Cornelius because he was saved by the words Peter spoke to them (Acts 10:33; 11:14). It was evidenced that the gospel is for all even as God had intended.



JAMES W. BOYD

Some contend this was another baptism of the Holy Spirit. But this is questionable. The event did not do for Cornelius what the Holy Spirit did for the apostles in Acts 2, so there was some difference. The likeness was that it was a direct operation, a like manner, but not a like measure. What Cornelius received was more akin to power granted by the laying on of apostolic hands than the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but in a direct fashion. The matter is not too important, but whatever about it, the purpose nor power was the same as Acts 2, but the manner received.

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