

# A Burning Fire



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

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# ***Respect of Persons***

Our text shall be James 2:1-13. The reason for the study is mentioned in the text itself, verse twelve, "*So speak ye and so do.*" In this passage we have a charge to keep and a responsibility to teach and practice what is taught herein.

Among the several methods of study is the profitable method called textual study where we open the Bible, read, and ponder the message, learning the mind of God as revealed there, really digging into the divine message.

So often today when one thinks of respect of persons he thinks of racial problems and racial prejudices that exist. This is certainly one area where the principles of this lesson can and must be applied. But the text deals more specifically with another kind of respect of persons, and so we shall follow the text.

## **Verse One**

James begins by referring to his readers as "*my brethren.*" This is a warm and affectionate salutation, very fitting in view of the strong rebuke that was to be forthcoming because of infractions against the will of Christ that was being practiced.

Verse one speaks of "*the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" which has reference to the entire Christian system, the religion of which Christ is the author and founder. The word "*faith*" is used to represent the whole of Christianity. The message is, to paraphrase, "Brethren, do not hold to Christianity and at the same time be showing partiality and special concern for the rich and highly favored of the world." Such favoritism and exaltation of people because of worldly considerations is foreign to the spirit of "*the faith.*"

It is very difficult to reach a rich person with the gospel anyway. He has the temptation to place his dependence on his wealth rather than the lowly Nazarene. Paul said, "*For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.*" (First Corinthians 1:26). So often they are too proud to come to Christ. How inconsistent to honor them above others when they enter the assembly.

Revelation 2:9, "*I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty (but thou art rich)...*" Materially those in Smyrna were poor, but spiritually they were rich in God's sight. Contrast that condition with Laodicea where they thought themselves rich, increased in goods, and lacking nothing. The Lord said they were "*wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.*" (Revelation 3:17).

If we today neglect the humble, faithful brother or sister in the Lord while heaping undue attention to the famous, prominent, materially successful notables of this world, even those not Christians, what kind of examples are we showing ourselves to be? The charge from heaven is thereby violated.

To honor brethren for their work's sake in the Lord is one of our privileges (First Thessalonians 5:13). But why exalt, in the church and before the church, the political office holder, the entertainer, the academic scholar, the famous sportsman, etc? These things say nothing of one's spiritual qualities. He might even be a false teacher. One can excel in all these things and still not be acceptable before God.

We have noticed how many brethren will "jump on the wagon" to proclaim someone who is noteworthy in the worldly affairs, sports, politics, money, entertainment, etc. and have lived to regret it because the prominent later show themselves to be poor examples. We have even noted how some brethren have paraded "beauty queens" before the young, taking no account of the immodesty connected with the acquisition of their fame, and brought them before the young as something to imitate. It is tragic that such who are so set in following the

world bring reproach against the church. Let Mr. Big Shot come around and everyone gasps with awe. Let brother and sister Faithful come around who has no such flare and nobody really cares. Such characterizes some assemblies, even those that call themselves "Churches of Christ."

### **Verses Eight and Nine**

*"If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well. But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors."* (James 2:8,9).

What is the "royal law" under consideration? It is the law of the King, the law governing the kingdom. It is the law of Christ, which includes such teaching as loving thy neighbor as thyself. It also embraces the teaching, *"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets."* (Matthew 7:12). Even many who call themselves Christians, even leaders in the church, sometimes treat people as if this teaching was never given, or did not apply to them as well as others.

To love your neighbor is not the whole law, but is a part of the law, and that part that directly relates to the subject under consideration in this portion of Scripture. It is that part of the law of Christ that James contends was being violated by his brethren. To be deficient in the performance of this duty is to stand condemned by the law of Christ as a sinner, a transgressor of the law. The deficiency that is condemned is showing respect of persons according to worldly standards.

### **Verses Ten and Eleven**

Just how serious is this transgression? *"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."* (James 2:10,11).

To violate God's law in one point is to be guilty of violating God's law. Obviously it does not mean one is guilty of every transgression, but he has offended the authority of God, violated the law of God, and stands condemned and in need of forgiveness. The same authority that teaches we are not to commit adultery also teaches not to kill. Doing either one is to show disrespect for God's authority. The One who taught one point taught them both. The One who taught against adultery and murder has also taught against showing respect to persons because of worldly fame, wealth, etc.

### **Verses Twelve and Thirteen**

This is the message that James says is to be spoken and practiced. We should consider it in view of the coming judgment that shall be administered according to the "*law of liberty*," (Verse 12).

In the judgment there shall not be respect of persons according to their riches, power, prominence in the world, social status and other such things that some consider to be of primary concern. We shall be judged according to the way we have lived before God and His will.

Those who come into our midst as faithful brethren, regardless of the matters that artificially designate people of "worldly worth," must be considered as brethren in the Lord because of their relationship with Christ. We must show love and mercy without respect to such things as those by which others may judge, lest we be deprived of the mercy upon which we must depend. "*For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy, and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.*" (James 2:13).

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# ***The Real and The Ideal***

As a person matures he encounters problems, is constantly facing the need for adjustments, decisions, selections. He must ever evaluate everything. This is an inescapable part of the maturation process.

One problem the young person meets rather early in life comes as he goes from the idealism of childhood into the realism of maturity. Everybody is somewhat shocked when reality is crammed upon them. There is a real difference in this world between what ought to be and what actually is. The very young are taught what to do and not to do. They are instructed concerning what is right as opposed to what is wrong. Deciding between right and wrong is sometimes easier than deciding between what is good, then better, then best - the ideal. From parents, Bible teachers, preachers, and other sources of teaching, the young are taught how things ought to be, how people should treat each other, what everyone should do and refrain from doing.

Yet, they are not very old before they are subjected to how things really are in life. They are made aware that the ideal, and the measures used in teaching them, are not always what they see in life. Let me illustrate.

## **What Is Real**

Young people are taught to love. But they grow up seeing so much war, hatred, killing, violence, and suffering. They observe exploitation of the poor, the misuse of power, lying and cheating in business, loafing and short-cutting on the job. They soon learn that all judges are not fair, that life is not fair, that all policemen are not honest, that every preacher is not even trying to live by

what he preaches, and even parents are not perfect. This is sometimes a very shattering experience.

It is aggravated in the church with division, gossip, strife, backbiting, false doctrines, and such things that too often are real. In school there is cursing, smoking, drinking, immorality among their peers, drugs, etc. They may even be snubbed by those they considered friends, and mocked by others when they are trying to do what they have been taught is right. The real is just so far removed from the ideals they are frustrated.

This has been a problem for both young and old alike. Some are shocked beyond belief. Some panic and cringe in fear. Some know not what to think, or to whom they can turn with confidence. Their foundations are shaken, and they know all is not well. They have entered the dangerous waters of adjustment to the fact that the ideal is not the same as the real world.

Our young generation is not the first to enter such waters. Every generation does it. There is danger to minimize the impact on the present youth, however, simply by dismissing it as something that everyone must face. I am convinced this is a very, very difficult time in which to rear children as God wants them to be. Yes, everyone must face it. But everyone does not face it successfully. Many are overcome by this transition period. They are drowned in the swirling waters of doubt and confusion. They perish before they even know there is solid ground to be found. They never recover. It is of some help to know that others have entered these hazardous waters and made it safely to the other side called adulthood without being scarred and scathed beyond repair. It is a trying time for the young as well as their parents. But many have made the trip of transition from the ideal to the real quite well. But let us be sobered by the fact that many are not successful!

### **What To Do**

How do you face this realistic problem? Some rebel against everything around them whatever it may be. They show their rebellion in their manners, dress, language, etc. They revolt, riot, destroy, burn, generally



create as much havoc as they think they can. They disobey every level of authority, including parents, civil law, and God. They demand a change! But they are not very certain what to change, or even why. Many display an air of "down-with-everything; up-with-nothing."

Some will attempt to pretend the inconsistencies between the real and ideal simply do not exist. They will try to ignore the gap between them. They use various forms of escapism. Actually this is cowardly and solves nothing for anybody. It usually aggravates problems.

Some have advocated, since the standards are not being followed, that there really is no standard, or what standards there are must be changed to fit what is. More and more people are living as if there was not right or wrong, and no need to discern concerning conduct. Yet, they seem to be the most miserable of all who encounter this disparity between the real and the ideal.

Others will admit there are standards, even God-given standards, but they are too busy trying to convert God to man, rather than convert man to God. They take God's Word and twist it around to make whatever they are doing acceptable. To illustrate, some have even taken the Bible to "prove" the acceptability of homosexuality.

Tragically, some give up the fight and cease to try to make any sense to life. They have never learned why they are alive. They think they cannot make it, or there is no use trying, and even destroy themselves in suicide.

### **The Way**

While people are using all these false and ineffective means to cope with the variance between the real and ideal, let us recognize we have a problem and accept the fact as a challenge rather than an insurmountable obstacle and barrier to a good life. We can be freed by truth (John 8:32). We are not in heaven while here on earth. This earth was never designed to be our heaven. But there is hope; there is a way; there is a solution; and life is worth living once you understand your own worth and your mission in it. We must learn and follow God's truth.

How can we find the truth? Cannot we seek truth with the aid of others? Cannot we learn truth for ourselves without having to be "burned" through personal experience of "*kicking against the pricks*?" Cannot we profit from what has gone before us (Romans 15:4)?

Cannot we remember that everything worthwhile has its costs? Nowhere does God promise us an easy life, a "bed of roses" without any thorns, with everything and everybody sweet and good. Even though there are glad moments and times of rejoicing, it is not always that way, as one soon realizes when he compares the real with the ideal. "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*" (Second Timothy 3:12). Christ offers us an abundant life, here and in the hereafter, but can we expect it without paying the price of conforming to His will?

Let it be insisted that each of us must learn the truth for ourselves. This does not mean you must learn every truth in every realm of human knowledge. But it does mean you must learn the truth in that which matters. But you do not have to learn every truth by yourself, throwing off everything others have learned before you and taught you, but you must learn it yourself. We cannot live the life God wants of us using only a "borrowed faith." Unfortunately, there are some who think this means we must disbelieve whatever came before us and invent something new. Not so! But we must have our own personal faith and conviction. Those who love us and teach us usually urge this even as they teach us what is of God. Wise men profit from the experiences and teaching of others who have been along the way. Wise men will give heed to the Word of God. Every generation must be taught and learn everything. When we finally accept this truism, then we are in a position to pursue the truth with confidence that we can know the truth, and practice the truth with success. It is a pressing urgency that we know this! There is no short-cut to spiritual victory! But there is a way because God has provided it!

### **God is the Way**

The way to ride the tempest of the difference between the real and the ideal is to put confidence in God. Learn from His will what He says is right and wrong. This means that a knowledge of the Bible is indispensable. Many youthful "Einsteins" learn how to make a living, but never learn how to live. They cannot make proper decisions because they do not even know the seriousness of their choices, let alone the standards by which choices should be made. God's Word tells us what our goal should be, and how it is to be reached. Not until a person is informed concerning the will of God can he overcome the problems the imposed adjustments demand of him.

Part of our problem in facing the ideal-real issue is the attempt to let God have His way, sometimes, but we reserve the final judgments for ourselves. Unless God rules our lives, we cannot succeed. **Compromise does not work!**

We also must resolve that we must not abandon the fight. *"Let us not grow weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."* (Galatians 6:9).

### **Look at Yourself**

Acquire and maintain a spirit of self-examination, striving to be fair and objective as possible, considering our weaknesses, but also our strengths. An unbalanced self-evaluation will produce cross-currents in these dark waters of uncertainty that could capsize us. *"Prove your own selves,"* was Paul's admonition. As you look at others, remove the beam from your own eye. This will enable you to see more clearly how to help others in removing their blemishes (Matthew 7:1-5). We are probably over-educated in seeing the faults of others, and may curse the world in which we live. But cursing it will not correct it. How can we be of any assistance toward correction if we blind ourselves to our own faults and talents?

It helps some to realize that all mistakes and errors people make are not due to Satanic hypocrisy. Not everyone is trying to pretend to be what they really are not. Even many who blunder are sincere, striving to

improve, but they are ignorant, possibly because they prefer to be that way, but often weak, frail, but pressing on. This does not mean we ignore wrong, nor allow ourselves to go along with wrong. But we must know that not everything needs changing. Only the bad needs changing. We must not throw out the good while reproving the bad. One hard lesson is learning the difference between what should be changed and what retained. But we better learn it as fast as we can!

### **Consider Your Heart**

Face it! Our own attitude is a deciding factor in the movement from the realm of the ideal into the realm of the real. "*Let all that you do be done in love.*" (First Corinthians 16:14). Do not confuse compromise with compassion, or love with liberty to do-your-own-thing. But this deals with our motives, which is a matter of the heart. If we will not be self-seeking, nor seeking change for change's sake, nor asserting our own superiority over all else, but seeking the other's highest good as God defines the good, then we shall make a beneficial contribution in life. Love for God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, His church, His Word, His people and the people of the world will at least provide you a firm basis of operation. Without it you cannot really succeed. (First Corinthians 13:1-3). We may do many things, but motive is of paramount importance.

None of us are unique in facing this frustrating episode in life of witnessing the gross spread between the ideal and the real. But when we realize it exists, and get a grasp on our own foundations that are laid solidly on Christ from Biblical revelation, we will not only be victorious over it, but will be a valuable assistant to many others around us in overcoming it. Complacency and indifference, like compromise, is never the right way.

We may not be able to change the world. The devil and his influence is very much in evidence. But we can brighten the corner where we are. We may not bring the world to Christ, but that is not our assigned task. It is our job to take Christ to the world. What the world does about Christ ultimately is a very personal and

individual decision. We may not save the world, but like Noah, we can save ourselves and our loved ones. We shall be able to come to the close of life with the satisfaction we lived on God's side, and we shall be met in eternity by the Savior and hear the words, "Well, done." Is that not of value?

Others have met this problem and have made and are still making contributions toward the ideal in spite of the real. Now it is your turn. You might do better than those before you. But you will not do as well except God is your guide.

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## ***Rewards From Christ***

Man is called by the Lord to worship and serve God in life. Ecclesiastes 12:13, "*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.*" This calling comes through the preaching and hearing of the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14; Romans 10:17). God calls man and draws man to Himself through Christ (John 12:32; 14:6). This is accomplished through teaching and learning. 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 shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*"

God calls and man must respond to that call. God motivates man to respond favorably and come to Him, appealing to man through the fear of hell (Matthew 10:28), through the expectation of reward (Matthew 5:12), and by His own goodness and love (Romans 2:4; First John 4:19). We shall concentrate on the second motivation.

### **Reward Passages**

Matthew 6:4, *"That thine alms may be in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly."*

Mark 9:41, *"For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward."*

Hebrews 11:26, *"Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompense of reward."*

Hebrews 11:6, *"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."*

Matthew 19:27-29, *"Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."* Peter asked a very logical question that all ask when considering discipleship. Where is the benefit in following Christ? We might add here that too many want to know what they can GET out of anything they do more than they want to know what they can GIVE for the benefit of God and others. God is not appealing to selfishness by offering rewards. He is motivating man to do what is good and right. Selfishness is evil and God does not tempt man to do evil (James 1:13). Giving rewards is God's way of manifesting His love upon those who return His love. Rewards do encourage us to respond to God's love. It helps us to understand the nature of man and God's compassion toward men.

### **Not Something Earned**

We are never to think that we receive from God spiritual rewards because we have earned them or merit them. Men may toil and reap certain rewards from their labors

and may be due them (First Timothy 1:18). But we cannot earn the spiritual blessings God gives. His gifts are not in payment for our righteousness. The glory and honor for man's reception of God's gifts belongs entirely to God.

God's gifts can be classified as physical and spiritual, or temporal and eternal. There are blessing for this life and for the life beyond this one. Every blessing is from God (James 1:17). It is a good admonition that we sing, "Count your many blessings, name them one by one, count your many blessings, see what God has done."

Not all physical blessings are conditioned upon man loving God. Matthew 5:45, *"That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust."* The wicked often prosper in the material things of life. They can gather the fruits of the proper application of certain principles of gain as much as anybody. We should not fret over their prosperity. We have to consider their ultimate accounting. Proverbs 24:19,10, *"Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious of the wicked; for there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out."* Psalm 37:1-3, 16, 25, *"Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb. Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed... A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked... I have been young, and now am old; yet, I have not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread."* But even the wicked are indebted to God for life, health, opportunity, material gain, etc., even though they honor Him not.

### **What Is and Is Not Promised**

Christians are not promised a material abundance in this life, but are promised an abundant life (John 10:10). But we must remember, Luke 12:15, *"And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."* There is more to life than material things,

even though some material things are necessities. It is well that the child of God read and reflect on the promises of provision found in Matthew 6:25-34. We are not promised all our wants, but our needs as God sees we have these needs. But as great as this assurance of material provision is, this reward and blessing is less significant than the spiritual rewards.

All of the spiritual blessings from God are not confined to the next life. Many are receive and enjoyed here and now. Only the child of God is promised the spiritual blessings. Ephesians 1:3, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."* One must be *"in Christ"* to have God's spiritual blessings. It is important that we know how to enter Christ.

Man can know that his sins are forgiven. When we realize that we do sin (Romans 3:23), and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:3), there can be no comfort of mind without knowing our sins are forgiven. Upon certain conditions God forgives sin (Acts 2:38; 3:19). Salvation is *"in Christ."* (Second Timothy 2:10). We do not have to live life in fear and dread of condemnation (Romans 8:1). That which bars a person from heaven, the barrier of sin, can be removed. Colossians 1:14, *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins."*

This does not mean we shall no longer be tempted. First Peter 5:8, *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."* But it means, First Corinthians 10:13, *"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 to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."* When we do sin, First John 1:7; 2:1, *"But 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... My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."*



## Peace

In Christ we have that much desired blessing of peace. First Corinthians 7:15, "...*but God hath called us to peace.*" Ephesians 2:14a, "*For he is our peace...*"

There are three kinds of peace. (1) There is peace within ourselves. Even in time of trouble, we can have peace within. John 16:13, "*These things I have spoken unto you that in me ye might have peace...*"

Few things are more desirable than a good conscience. When you know you can face yourself, and can live with your own deeds, even know that you are doing right, know that you are a part of something greater and bigger than you are, then you are blessed indeed. We can have this peace within ourselves when we are in Christ.

(2) Following Christ can produce peace with our fellowman. We realize that it can also produce conflict with others. How mankind has plotted, schemed and searched for ways to live peacefully beside each other! Yet, there seems to be more and more strife and warfare. Of course, it takes two to have peace between the two. One cannot make peace by himself. Not all people will follow the Lord, and when that is the situation there cannot be peace but a sword (Matthew 10:34-37).

But when two will walk with Christ they will also be walking together. The closer one draws to Christ the closer he is to others who draw near to Christ. Christ brought peace and reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:14-16; Galatians 3:28,29).

The sweetest peace that can exist on this earth is the genuine love and fellowship of Christian brethren. What a tragedy when one will allow sin and error to break it.

We who are Christians must understand that armies, wars, councils, treaties, world organizations, etc. cannot and will not bring peace. To have peace there must be the conversion of the hearts of mankind to the will of God. Even though these things have a place and are useful in maintaining some semblance of peace, it is in the Lord

and in His church where people *"beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks."*

(3) The third kind of peace that we have in Christ is the greatest of all three, and that is peace with God. Romans 5:1, *"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* We declare war against God by our sins. We must be reconciled to God, and only through Christ can this reconciliation be realized. Ephesians 2:16, *"And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby."*

To live in peace with God means life has meaning and purpose. We can enjoy the sense of accomplishment of that which is eternally worthwhile. We are permitted to live even to our last days without regret. We live day by day with what Paul calls *"that blessed hope"* in the heart (Titus 2:13). Who can measure the value of dying at peace with God? (Revelation 14:13).

### **Blessings to Come**

The blessings we have been naming are both physical and spiritual. But they are blessings we can enjoy in the here and now. The grandest blessing of all is the reward in heaven. Matthew 5:12, *"...for great is your reward in heaven..."* Romans 8:16-18, *"The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."* Second Timothy 4: 6-8, *"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."* First Peter 1: 3-5, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth*

*not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."*

The reward of heaven, an eternal existence of bliss and joy in heaven that shall never be interrupted, is far too marvelous for adequate description. But such shall be the eternal destiny of those who live and die faithful in Christ. As John wrote, First John 3:2, "*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.*" While the full import of that statement may escape us, we cannot doubt the glory of reward that awaits us.

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## ***The Spirit of Caleb***

There is great meaning for us in Romans 15:4, "*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*" Again, "*Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come.*" (First Corinthians 10:11). Man not only can profit from his own experiences, but he who is wise can also profit from the experiences of others. Although many details of life may change through the years, man, his basic needs, the principles of truth, remain essentially the same year after year.

There are two equally erroneous concepts regarding the new and the old. Some have the idea if something is new it must be bad, and only the old is worthwhile. Others have the opposite thought that if something is new it must be good. Our standard must be if something is right according to God's Word it is good, otherwise, it is bad. God has revealed to man in His Word the right and wrong principles and specifics. The Scriptures furnish us completely unto every good work (Second Timothy

3:16,17). *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my pathway."* (Psalm 119:105). Often God informs us of His will by revealing the lives of those who have lived before us and His evaluation of those lives.

### **Attitude of Heart**

One necessity in serving God properly is to possess the right attitude of heart. *"Keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life."* (Proverbs 4:23). God wants man to have the right kind of spirit within him, the correct frame of mind and disposition. *"Blessed are the pure in heart..."* (Matthew 5:8). We are to *"...call on God out of a pure heart."* (Second Timothy 2:22). In the Old Testament we read of a man whose spirit, attitude, was acceptable to God and who is presented to us as an example to follow. The man of whom we speak was named Caleb. We wish to consider six attitudes he possessed that we would do well to imitate.

### **Consider the Man**

Let us first become acquainted with Caleb. Caleb was an Israelite who lived during a crucial period of Israel's history. He was among those who were led by Moses out of Egyptian bondage. He spent some forty years of his life with Israel in the wilderness, and was involved in conquering the land of Canaan. He was one of the two men over twenty years of age that left Egypt that God permitted to enter the promised land. His successful entry was largely due to his attitude and how it was manifested by his words and deeds. His life was hard, dangerous, and a continual struggle for survival. God speaks of Caleb in the following manner when He denounced the ten faithless spies, *"But my servant Caleb, because he hath another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereunto he went, and his seed shall possess it."* (Numbers 10:24). He was a man of a different spirit and it made a difference.

Israel had left Egypt and had come to the southern borders of Canaan. Moses sent out twelve spies to view the land. They were gone for forty days, returned, and gave their report. *"And they went and came to Moses and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of*

*Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran to Kadesh, and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land. And they told him and said, We came into the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey, and this is the fruit of it. Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled and very great, and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south, and the Hittites and Jebusites and Amorites dwell in the mountains, and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan.” (Numbers 13:26-29). The conclusion of most of the spies was, “We be not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof, and all the people that we saw in it are men of great stature. And there we saw giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants, and we were in our sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.” (Numbers 13:31-33).*

Upon hearing this the people murmured against Moses and Aaron. “*Would God we had died in the land of Egypt, or would we had died in this wilderness.*” (Numbers 14:2). This fearful, faithless attitude is in deep contrast with the spirit of Caleb. He said, “*Let us go up at once and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it.*” (Numbers 13:30). This may well have been the finest hour of his life. But the people paid no attention to him and would have stoned him, and Joshua who stood with him.

### **Faith**

Caleb had a spirit of faith in God. God had brought the people from Egypt to the promised land as He said He would. Israel had received God’s provisions throughout their journey in the wilderness. The land was just as God said it would be, flowing with milk and honey. With God, taking the land was possible, yea, certain. Caleb did not minimize the size of the task, but, like Paul said concerning Christ, “*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*” (Philippians 4:13). Caleb trusted God. Should we not imitate his faith?

## **Courage**

Caleb also had a spirit of courage. His courage was directly the result of his faith. Though the opponents were strong, even giants and had walled cities, he was not afraid. Along with Joshua, he said, "*If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us, a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us; their defense is departed from them, and the Lord is with us, fear them not.*" (Numbers 14:8,9). His courageous attitude was similar to that which David expressed many years later, "*Let no man's heart fail because of him, thy servant will go and fight this Philistine... The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.*" (First Samuel 17: 32, 37). Today we must be mindful of the warning in Revelation 21:8, that among those that shall be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone are, "...*the fearful.*" The lack of courage to stand for the right and against the wrong is not to be characteristic of us. We must never weaken and surrender to the evil world.

## **Cooperation**

Caleb had the spirit of cooperation. He said, "*Let US* (emphasis, JWB) *go up,*" not let me do it or you do it. "*WE* (emphasis, JWB) *are able to overcome it.*" Working together the task could be accomplished. Good men, working side by side, for the common good and a single goal can accomplish wonders. There is strength in unity. United we stand and divided we fall. This same attitude possessed the people of Judah under the leadership of Nehemiah when time came for the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. They said, "*Let US* (emphasis, JWB), *rise up and build.*" (Nehemiah 2:18). Caleb sought no power, rank, personal glory or gain. He wanted to cooperate with others, encourage others to cooperate. Today we must have this same attitude toward the work we are to do for the Lord. Hand in hand and heart with heart we can do what God wants done.

## **Optimism and Enthusiasm**

Caleb had the spirit of optimism and enthusiasm. This is evidenced in his words. "*Let us rise up AT ONCE AND POSSESS IT.*" (Emphasis, JWB). He had the "we can" attitude. "Can't never could; but can can." He was burning with zeal. He wanted action. Now was the time. The task was before them and his call was, "To the work." "They can who think they can." There was no need to delay but to go up "*at once.*" Success was theirs to have. They could possess the land. Delay was only destructive to them. Opportunity was knocking and if unanswered it would go passed them.

Unfortunately, Israel did hesitate, deliberate, procrastinate, and did not go up. They were not allowed to enter the land until another forty years of long, arduous, weary wanderings in the wilderness, and until death had overtaken all those twenty years old and older, except Joshua and Caleb. Certainly proper planning is necessary in tackling a work. But there eventually comes a time for action and deeds. If no action follows, both the optimism and enthusiasm will drain away and the opportunity departs. Every Christian ought have the attitude, "Let us be up and at it."

### **Submission**

Caleb had the spirit of total submission to the way of the Lord. God said of Caleb, "*He hath followed me fully.*" What a commendation! Often a dreadful spiritual plague dominates, handicaps the life and service of many professed Christians. Indifference, lukewarmness, half-hearted service, partial service, reserved obedience is the case. A religion of convenience is not conviction. Inconsistency, conflicts of interest often are evident, and the Lord is forced to take a "back seat" and second best. There is not enough of the attitude that we sing, "All to Jesus I surrender." To follow God fully means to give God His way, every day, every time, all the time, in whatever situation. Christianity is of such a nature that man cannot be a true disciple if he does not follow God fully. Since God gave His only begotten Son, and He gave His life, why should we expect God to be pleased with us when our devotion, worship, dedication, service, obedience and daily life is stained with worldly pursuits, personal whims, blighted by negligence, marred by an

"on and off, now and then" kind of religion? The lesson of putting first things first and following God fully is one we all need to study. *"He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."* (Matthew 10:39).

### **Patience and Endurance**

Finally, Caleb had the spirit of patience and endurance because he had hope. Through no fault of his own, in spite of everything he could do to prevent it, Caleb was denied entrance into the promised land at that time. Because of the sins of others he was subjected to the wilderness for forty years. Such was a trial of personal stability, patience, and the power to endure. There was the temptation to be discouraged and abandon the goal, just give up, quit, with the attitude, "What's the use, nobody cares." He could have become bitter and blamed his suffering on others. Throughout these forty burdensome years he never lost hope for himself or Israel. Such a spirit is indispensable for today's servant of God. *"He that endureth to the end, shall be saved."* (Matthew 10:22). *"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."* (Revelation 2:10). This means we will be faithful not only "until" death, but faithful even if it means faithfulness means death.

We now draw a few conclusions. How much better and more dutiful servants of God we would be if we had the same spirit within as was within Caleb! We need the spirit of faith, courage, cooperation, optimism and zealous enthusiasm. We need total fellowship and submission, patience and endurance with hope. In this way we shall build better families, communities, congregations. This way we can make significant contributions to generations yet to come if time continues. Furthermore, regardless of others and their destiny, like Caleb, it will lead us to the eternal promised land of heaven. Is it not worth it all?

\* \* \* \* \*

**With this issue we begin our thirteenth volume.**





## Liberal Inconsistency

Liberals hate criticism, unless they are doing the criticizing. If you expose publicly the error they teach publicly they cry "Foul." (They contend we must come to them privately about it. That way they can ignore it.) But they are quick and ready to publicly criticize you for publicly criticizing their publicly taught error and feel no necessity to approach you privately first. Faithful brethren do not mind being "*ready to give answer*," but liberals must feel they are excluded from that. Let them publicly criticize whatever they wish. Faithful brethren won't cry. They do not have to come to us privately before they oppose publicly what we do publicly. But they ought to at least live by the rule they have concocted for others. But you hear them publicly criticizing others for publicly criticizing their publicly taught error, demanding they be approached privately, but feel no need to comply to their own rule. Inconsistency is a trademark of liberalism and liberals. JWB



JAMES W. BOYD

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

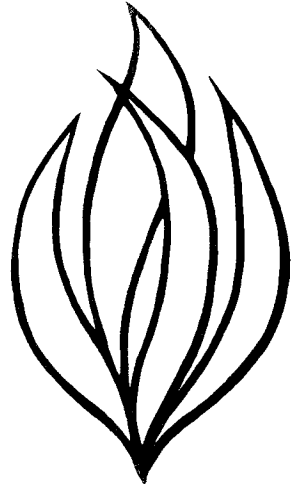
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# A Burning Fire



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



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# **Prophecy Concerning Himself**

Have you ever wondered what it would have been like to have lived in Bible times and been a part of the tremendous events recorded? Would you like to have talked with the great men of the Bible? There are two conversations, not exclusively, but two I would have wanted to have heard. One is mentioned in Exodus 18:7,8, *"And Moses went out to meet his father in law, and did obeisance, and kissed him; and they asked each other of their welfare; and they came into the tent. And Moses told his father-in-law all that the Lord had done unto Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, and all the travail that had come upon them by the way, and how the Lord delivered them."* Would it not have been thrilling to hear Moses tell of his appearances in Pharaoh's court, his encounter with the magicians, the plagues, crossing the Red Sea, the fall of the Egyptian army, God's provision of water and manna, and on and on? We have the inspired recorded, and that is sufficient, but to have heard him tell it to Jethro would be something special.

The second conversation that would have been tremendous is mentioned in Luke twenty-four. Two of those close to Jesus were on the road to Emmaus discussing the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus and the report of His resurrection. Jesus joined them. However, they were not at first aware of who He was. Jesus took advantage of the opportunity to teach them concerning the prophecies as they related to Himself. Verse twenty-seven reads, *"And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."* What a privilege to have heard Jesus teach the prophetic sayings of the Old Testament prophets and have Him show how they applied to Him!

The significance of Jesus fulfilling the prophecies cannot be overstated because these stand as irrefutable evidence that He is the Messiah and knowledge of the

prophecies ascertains this truth. Acts 3:18, "*But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.*" Acts 3:24, "*Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.*" John 5:39, "*Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.*" John 5:46, 46, "*For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?*" Matthew 5:17, 18, "*Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*"

God expects us to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God. But God has also provided mankind sufficient evidence whereby we can believe and know with certainty that Jesus is the Christ, God's Son. The fulfillment of prophecies concerning Himself are demonstrations of this truth regarding Him.

### **Genesis**

There were vague prophecies concerning Christ even before the more explicit ones given by Moses and others. 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.*" The One who would bruise the head of Satan was the "*seed of woman.*" This is an obvious reference to the Savior. Equally obvious is the implication of a virgin birth. He was not the combined seed of man and woman. He was the seed of woman, providing His humanity, but conceived by the Holy Spirit, providing His Deity.

The promises from God to Abraham until Moses included many references that would be accomplished only in Christ. But Jesus spoke of those prophecies from the time of Moses, so let us confine ourselves to a few of them spoken by the prophets concerning Him.

### **Isaiah**

Isaiah 7:14, *"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 quoted this prophecy (Matthew 1:23), saying it concerned the birth of Christ. *"Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet..."* (Matthew 1:22).

### **Micah**

Micah had prophesied, *"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose going forth have been from of old, from everlasting."* With clear reference to the eternal One who was to come, the little city of Bethlehem was announced as the place from which He would come. Matthew 2:1-6 tells the story of the wise men who came to visit the King of the Jews and to worship. They were directed to Bethlehem, as the prophet had written, and where Jesus was born of the virgin Mary.

Micah had also prophesied He would come from the tribe of Judah. That Jesus was of that tribe is noted in His genealogy in Matthew 1:2, and by express statement of Hebrews 7:14, *"For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah."*

### **Isaiah, Again**

Even more specific regarding His ancestry, it was prophesied that He would be of the house of David. *"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 even for ever. The zeal of the Lord will perform this."* (Isaiah 9:6, 7). Jeremiah said, *"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth."* (Jeremiah 23:5).

Again, the recorded genealogies of Jesus in both Matthew and Luke affirm that Jesus was a fleshly descendant of David, as the prophets had foretold.

### **Jeremiah**

In Jeremiah 32:5 we read, *"Thus saith the Lord, A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children because they are not."*

Matthew records how Herod, seeing that he had not received the information from the wise men that he sought, attempted to kill the infant Jesus by slaughtering the babies around the area where the Messiah was to be born, hoping to destroy the child. Matthew 2:17 says, *"Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying..."*, and then quoted the words written in Jeremiah 31:5.

### **Hosea**

Because of Herod's determination to destroy Jesus, we read in Matthew 2:13-15, *"And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word; for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son."* This was reference to a prophecy by Hosea in Hosea 11:1.

### **Zechariah**

At this point the reader should read Matthew 21:1-9 and the record of the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem at the beginning of His final week on earth before His crucifixion. The people cried out, *"Hosanna to the son of David; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest."* (Matthew 21:9). Jesus came into the city riding upon an ass, the royal beast on which Jewish kings rode. This detail had already been



prophecied hundreds of years before in Zechariah 9:9, *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee; he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."*

### **Psalms**

Psalm 41:9, *"Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me."* Zechariah 11:12, *"And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver."* Matthew 26:15 records that as the exact price the chief priests gave to Judas to betray Jesus.

After Judas returned the money, seeing he had betrayed innocent blood, the money was used to buy a potter's field, a place for burying strangers and the poor. This is said to fulfill a prophecy by Jeremy (Jeremiah). Actually the prophecy is recorded in Zechariah 11:13. The explanation is that in the listing of the prophetic books, the Jews listed Jeremiah first, and his name is used to refer to prophetic books, not specific reference to a book written by Jeremiah. Zechariah was, of course, one of the prophets and his book is the prophetic book.

### **Many Others**

Other prophecies which Jesus fulfilled are such things as His silence when standing before His accusers (Isaiah 53:7). Matthew wrote, *"And he answered him to never a word, insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly."* (Matthew 27:14).

Isaiah 53: 9-12 tells how He would die alongside malefactors. *"Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left."* (Matthew 27:38).

Psalm 22:18 prophecied that men would cast lots for his garments. Matthew 27:35 reads, *"And they crucified him; and parted his garments, casting lots; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my*

*garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots."*

*Psalm 34:20, "He keepeth all his bones; not one of them is broken." John 19: 32,32, "Then came soldiers, and brake the legs of the first and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs." Another detailed prophecy fulfilled!*

*Of the entire proceedings regarding His mock trial and death, Jesus had said, "Thinketh thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that this it must be?" Over and over, record after record, prophecy after prophecy, we read of those things that would transpire concerning the Savior of mankind. Jesus fulfilled them. It was for our sake, and that we might have the evidence to convince us of the truth that we must believe in order to be saved. These are the kind of things He discussed with the two disciples as they walked along the road to Emmaus.*

*We do not have a record of all that Jesus said and did, nor possibly every prophecy He fulfilled. We do not have a detailed account of His explanations given on the road to Emmaus. But we have all that is needed to prove to us that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and all that implies. "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." (John 20:30-31).*

\* \* \* \* \*

**One of the most difficult things I find to accept as I grow older, having preached the gospel now for forty years this June, is to see churches and brethren that I have known, with whom I have labored, to whom I have preached, both as regular preacher or in gospel meetings, and see them now defiantly set aside the truth we once upheld together, and see them seek to be like the nations round about, and act as if truth had never been their first love. JWB**

# **Matters of Faith and Opinion**

Our lesson deals with authority. An understanding of this subject is important because it affects unity, and the effectiveness of the church at work. Misunderstanding has created problems, divisions, and apostasy. Psalm 133:1, "*Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.*" That which disrupts unity is a serious matter for those who love the Lord. The only way to have genuine unity is to have an understanding of the truth and follow it.

What do we mean by matters of faith and opinion? Matters of faith are those things imposed upon us because God has spoken concerning them. Matters of faith are those revelations in His Word that make up the faith or religion of Jesus Christ.

## **The Faith**

Jude three speaks of "*the faith*" once delivered to the saints. Matters of faith are those points that are embodied in that faith, that exist by the Lord's authority and direction, that are to be believed and practiced because they are revealed by God. Matters of faith are those truths that come to us by the Word (Romans 10:17).

For instance, the Bible reveals the terms of entrance into the company of the saved, the church, to be faith, repentance, confession of faith, and baptism into Christ. These are matters of "*thus saith the Lord.*" The Bible reveals the avenues of worship to be singing, praying, the Lord's Supper, giving, and proclaiming His Word. We cannot add to nor take from what God has said. There is no room for deviation from them (Galatians 1:6-9; Second John 9-11; Revelation 21:18,19; First Peter 4:11; Colossians 3:17). They cannot be violated without sinning against God's authority.

## **Opinion**

Matters of opinion are matters that demand and allow the exercise of human judgment. There are matters commanded and authorized of God (matters of faith) for which specific directions as to how to carry out these things are not given in every detail. The details have to be supplied, nonetheless, and are supplied by human judgment. When God gives a command or direction, and tells how it is to be expedited, then the command and the way of carrying out that command are matters of faith. But when God has given command, direction, or permission for something without giving details as to how it is to be expedited, the command must be obeyed, but man must use his judgment to supply the details that God has not specified. Opinions are involved, and human opinions are not infallible and are subject to question and variation. We are to be charitable toward one another respecting matters of opinion.

For instance, we are commanded to go and preach the gospel. We are told to preach, and what to preach. These are matters of faith. But we are not told how to go. We must use our judgment. We may go in whatever way seems the most expedient, whether we walk, run, ride, fly, float, etc. One may prefer to walk, and another prefer to fly. It is a matter of opinion and we must allow each one to exercise his own judgment or opinion.

We are commanded to teach, but the method of teaching is not specified. We may use chalk boards, radio, television, tracts, etc. When we teach we may use the lecture method, question and answer method, whatever one thinks best for the situation. It is a matter of opinion.

We are told to baptize, and this is a matter of faith. God has spoken. But where we baptize is not specified and that is a matter of judgment so long as we have ample supply of water to immerse. That is a matter of opinion.

The use of such judgment cannot and must not alter the thing commanded, neither take from it or add to it. We are to carry out what is commanded. There is no right or wrong way of doing it when God has not directed which

way, and the way we choose does not violate His will in any other way. Some ways may be better than others, but which way one chooses is a matter of opinion.

### **Whose Opinion?**

In matters of congregational efforts, someone must decide which opinion will prevail. Obviously, everybody cannot do everything "his way" because there may be several ways of accomplishing something. Those with the responsibility and authority to decide in matters of opinion for the congregation are the elders of the church. They have the oversight and are the overseers (First Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28). Their decisions are to be obeyed and respected by the members (Hebrews 13:17). They decide only in matters of opinion, not matters of faith, because the Word has already been revealed the matters of faith. In matters of opinion there must be charity and consideration one of another.

### **Cases in Point**

To illustrate further, consider financing of the work of the church. First Corinthians 16:1,2 and Second Corinthians 9:6,7 teach we are to give, a free-will offering, as we have been prospered, as we have purposed, cheerfully and liberally. There is no authority for fund raising through raffles, pie suppers, carnivals, rummage sales, business ventures, etc. But as to how the collections may be gathered there is room and need for human judgment. Some may wish to "pass the plate by the people." It would be just as acceptable with God to "pass the people by the plate," though possibly not as expedient. This decision requires judgment.

Consider the music in worship. God has spoken and every time He says sing. He did not say to just make music (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). For this reason we reject so-called translations that include the words "make music" which God never said. No man has the right to introduce another kind of music that does not have God's authority. Playing instruments produces another kind of music that is unauthorized and therefore wrong. But whether we use song books, have two or four songs, song four part harmony or all sing the

melody are matters of judgment and opinion. On these matters God has not spoken, although the command to sing must be expedited some way.

Regarding the work with which the church is charged, we are to preach the gospel to the lost to save the lost, edify the saved, to preserve the saved and/or recover the fallen, and render benevolent aid to those who are in need as we have opportunity. For each of these areas of work we have a "*thus saith the Lord*." These are matters of faith as to what the church can and cannot do with God's authority. Unless an activity is authorized it cannot be lawfully expedited in any way. No man, board, or any group has the right to saddle upon the church secular education, entertainment, and such things as building gymnasiums for fun and games. No man can arrange some unauthorized organization to do the work of the church. The government of the church is sufficient to do the work the Lord has given the church to do. It is not the work of the church to be involved in secular schools, politics, athletic games, nor to usurp the role of the home or the civil government.

### **Decisions Must Be Made**

Doing the work of evangelism, edification and benevolence requires many human decisions because every detail in doing that work is not revealed in Scripture. Who shall we send into the mission field? Where shall we send them? How much is adequate support? What equipment is needed? Shall we conduct classes? Where shall we assemble? Who is to teach at what time? How do we care for the needy, such as orphans, widows, destitute, etc.? All these things are required in doing the work, but the manner of doing it is not a matter of faith but opinion. Somebody decides.

As for carrying for the homeless, the church is not designed to be the home. It cannot be the home. There are no elders over a home. But the church provides for the homeless by providing a home. How these provisions are to be supplied falls into the realm of the unrevealed but necessary judgments.

### **A Very Clear Example**

One other illustration makes the distinction between matters of faith and opinion very clear. Hebrews 10:25, First Corinthians 11:20, Acts 20:7 all teach the command to assemble on the first day of the week. No man can set that aside without violating God's will. But still there are matters of judgment that must be determined. Where shall we meet? At what hour on the first day of the week do we meet? How long shall we assemble together? All these things are matters of human opinion.

To ignore these principles of faith and opinion is to ignore the difference between the Lord's church and denominationalism. It is to invite confusion, strife, and division. Departure from these principles has brought havoc to the church too many times, from liberals as well as those who would bind human laws. Those who ignore God's authority by loosing what God has bound, or binding what God has loosed, create problems for God's people. We have no right to dismiss any matter of faith. We have no right to make any matter of opinion a matter of faith.

History shows how disrespect for this distinction has created barriers between individuals, congregations, and retarded the cause of Christ. The denominational world is often guilty of disregarding matters of faith. Brethren have also been guilty of confusing matters of faith and opinion. We need to recognize the difference, abide in His authority, have authority for all that we do, bind what God has bound, and loose what God looses.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **The Church is a Haven For Sinners**

A haven is a place of safety, a harbor of protection. Those in the church are those who have turned from sin, been cleansed by His blood, added to the church and enjoy the spiritual security from God. Thanks be to God for the church as a haven for those who have left sin. But woe to any church that becomes a haven for sinners who persist in their sins. Some churches include in their membership anybody whether they have left sin or not. This is not the kind of haven the church must be. JB

# ***Thoughts in Threes***

We shall discuss some basic and fundamental themes of the gospel of Christ in this lesson. They shall be presented in six groups of three points each. Knowledge of such things are vital to our spiritual welfare.

## **Group One**

There are three facts we must consider. (1) All who obey not the gospel of Christ are lost and remain lost until they obey. All have sinned (Romans 3:10,23; 5:12). The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). Those who obey are the saved (Hebrews 5:9). If one does not obey he shall be punished (First Thessalonians 1:6-9). Regardless of who we are, where we live, or when since the day of Pentecost we live, the gospel of God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16), and those who reject it are lost.

(2) The gospel is the power of salvation (Romans 1:16). Paul told the Corinthians they were saved by the gospel (First Corinthians 15:1-4). We are saved by the Word (James 1:21). By the Word God calls us (Second Thessalonians 2:14). We are saved by the doctrine (First Timothy 4:16). Christ is the only Savior (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). We learn of Him through the gospel revealed in the inspired Scriptures (John 20:30,31). We must be born again (John 3:3-5), and we are begotten by the gospel (First Peter 1:23). Paul said the Corinthians were begotten through the gospel (First Corinthians 4:15). Since faith is essential to salvation, we need to understand that faith comes through hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

(3) We cannot expect the children of the devil to spread the saving gospel. This is the work of the children of God. Men are not saved by some direct operation of the Holy Spirit separate and apart from the Word of God. Salvation is according to the law of Christ, not by some miracle. This is the reason for the commission to go and



preach the gospel to all the world (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15,16). "*Preach the word*" was the apostolic command (Second Timothy 4:2). One cannot be saved without calling on the name of the Lord, nor can they call on Him in whom they have not believed, nor can they believe on Him of whom they have not heard, nor can they hear without a preacher, and the preacher must be sent (Romans 10:13-17).

### **Group Two**

The second set of threes logically follows the first. To win souls, lead them to Christ and salvation, demands there be the exertion of power (1) There must be heart power, by which we mean, love. There must be love for God, love for His Word, love for the lost. Paul's heart's desire was the salvation of other (Romans 10:1). Possibly this is why more of us are not trying to win the lost. We lack love. If a child was in danger on the highway, we would exert all of our energies to save that child from physical death. How much more should we be concerned in saving those who are in danger of spiritual death!

(2) Saving others demands head power, by which we mean knowledge of the saving message. We cannot teach what we do not know. Paul urged Timothy to teach others, who would in turn teach even more (Second Timothy 2:2). To know demands that we study (Second Timothy 2:15). We may have a zeal to serve God and save the lost, but zeal without knowledge is destructive (Romans 10:2,3). We cannot overemphasize the need of knowledge.

(3) In addition to heart power and head power there must be foot power. There must be the actual going to another with the truth. To say and do not makes us unprofitable (James 1:22). We must be about the Father's business.

### **Group Three**

The third set of threes are matters that are immeasurable and beyond comprehension. (1) We cannot fathom the value of a soul. Jesus said it was worth more than the whole world (Matthew 16:26). An awesome price was paid for the soul (Galatians 1:4). How much do you

value your soul? Better that we ask, how much do we value the souls of our children, friends, brethren, and neighbors?

(2) We cannot measure eternity. There really is nothing with which we can compare it. We have heard stories that try to show eternity. One says it is like a bird flying from the west coast with a drop of water from the Pacific Ocean to the east coast to the Atlantic, then back again. When the bird has emptied one ocean into the other eternity will have just begun. Another says it is like a spider weaving a web from here to the sun and taking one grain of soil from here to there each trip and when the earth is removed eternity will just be staring. This does not illustrate eternity, but it does illustrate our inability to comprehend eternity. Yet, we are assured that we shall exist in eternity. Matthew 25:46, "*These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.*"

(3) We cannot put a measure on everlasting punishment. Second Thessalonians 1:9, "*...who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.*" It is ever being destroyed but never destroyed. It is ever dying but never dying. It is ever burning but never consumed. Even such terms as "*lake of fire and brimstone, second death, weeping, gnashing of teeth, outer darkness*" do not give us a full understanding of the punishment of hell.

#### **Group Four**

This takes us to three impelling motives for serving God.

(1) There is the fear of hell. Hebrews 10:30,31, "*For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*" Hebrews 2:1-3a, "*Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation...*" The fact is, we shall not escape. Peter makes

this reality vivid and documents it by God's dealing with those of the past in Second Peter 2:4-9.

Warnings of hell are intended to appeal to mankind through fear. When one knows what the Scriptures teach regarding hell he is inclined to want to avoid hell at all costs. This is God's way of disturbing and arousing the sinful soul to face the reality of his lost condition.

(2) God motivates us also through the offer of reward. Once Peter asked the Lord, *"What shall we have therefore"* (Matthew 19:27-29). Paul wrote in Romans 8:18, *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."* Matthew 5:12, *"...for great is your reward in heaven."* Second Timothy 4:6-8, *"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 unto me in that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."* Revelation 2:10, *"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."*

Just as the knowledge of hell strikes fear, the knowledge of an abundant life here and in the hereafter appeals to us through the expectation of reward. This is another of God's ways to bring out the best that is in us, provoking us to seek the way that brings forth such blessings.

(3) The highest and noblest motive for serving God is a response to God's love by loving in return. First John 4:18,19, *"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. We love him because he first loved us."*

As a parent may produce obedience from his child through the threat of punishment, or through an offer of reward, he is most pleased when the child responds simply because of his love and respect for the parent. So it is with God and our obedience unto Him.

## **Group Five**

Another set of threes focuses on the three areas of the gospel. (1) There are facts to be believed. These facts include such things as the revelation concerning God, Christ, Holy Spirit, church, plan of salvation, the nature of man, etc. Inspired testimony gives us the evidence of things to be believed.

(2) There are also promises from God that are to be enjoyed and appreciated. We have the forgiveness of past sins, companionship and fellowship with Deity and the saved, provisions for this life, the power to endure and overcome evil, and the eternal promise of heaven.

(3) There are also commands to be obeyed. One can do one of two things regarding a command, whether human or divine. He can either obey it, or disobey it. God has given certain commands that must be obeyed before the blessings of God are obtained and given. The promises of the gospel are conditioned upon obedience to the commands to believe in Christ as the Son of God, repentance of sins, confession of faith in Christ, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins.

### **Group Six**

The last set of threes are the three periods of our existence: namely, the past, present, and future. (1) The past is gone and cannot be recovered. Yet, there may be sins committed in the past that remain upon our guilt-stained souls and will remain until forgiven through the blood of Jesus Christ.

(2) There are certain events in our future that are inescapable. We shall live until inevitable physical death. God has assured us of the return of the Savior, the resurrection from the dead, the judgment, and entrance into eternity. From these there is no escape for anyone (Hebrews 10:27; John 5:28,29; Second Corinthians 5:10).

(3) The present is ours to use. We can take advantage of the present to have our sins blotted out by reaching the saving blood of Christ when we obey the commands of the gospel. The present is all we have, but we do have that. Yesterday is forever gone, and tomorrow may never be. Second Corinthians 6:2, "*For he saith, I have heard*

*thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."* Hebrews 3:15, " *Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts..."*

There will come a time in our existence when we shall reflect on the thoughts presented in this lesson whether we give them serious thought now or not. When that time comes, how will we consider them? Will we be blessed in that we gave heed to the truth of them and acted accordingly? Or shall we consider them in the dismal and insurmountable gloom of regret?

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Three Things the Devil Wants to Do**

Every person, regardless of how many friends he has, has at least one enemy. This is true of Christians and non-Christians. That enemy is the devil. First Peter 5:8, "*Be sober; be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.*" We are called to resist this enemy. James 4:7, "*Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*"

The devil is presented in Scripture as a tempter, oppressor, one who seeks to ensnare mankind, deceitful (the wiles of the devil), having the power of death, the father of lies, and when allowed, he can fill the heart to do evil. He is called the devil, Satan, a dragon, an old serpent. He is the enemy of mankind because he seeks the overthrow, failure, injury, harm, and spiritual death of everyone.

### **He Exists**

Some may laugh at the teaching about the devil, choosing to reject his reality. To some he may be, as one

little boy said, like Santa Claus, he is your daddy. The smugness, sophistication that usually accompanies the rejection of the Biblical teaching of the devil is punctured when we realize that the same Bible that teaches of God also teaches about the devil. The same book that gives man hope of eternal life also warns of eternal damnation. Consistency and common sense will not allow one to accept the reality of God and deny the reality of the devil. The evidence for the existence of God is overwhelming. When you consider that evidence, then you will be convinced that God is, and laughing about the devil would not appear quite as intelligent as some would have others to believe.

The Bible presents the devil as working, producing works in a very diligent way. Our study centers on at least three things the devil wants to accomplish with respect to mankind. When we know his goals, we can blunt his attacks. Forewarned is to be forearmed.

### **His First Goal**

If you are not "*in Christ*," or in the Lord's church, Satan wants to keep you out of Christ and His church. Why? It is because the church is composed of the saved (Acts 2:47). Salvation is in Christ (Second Timothy 2:10). All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). There is no condemnation in Christ (Romans 8:1). God is glorified in the church (Ephesians 3:21). God's wisdom is manifested by the church (Ephesians 3:10). The very existence of the church, the saved, is a humiliation to the devil. One who is not "*in Christ*" is doomed and damned, and that sad condition is precisely what Satan wants for every person.

How does he keep people out of the church? He uses lies and deceit. He conveys, through his agents, that sin is only an old-fashioned concept rather than a reality, and man should not worry about it. He has people teaching that one can be saved outside the church. He has his preachers ridiculing the church, misrepresenting it, saying that one is just as good as another, and that it is not essential to salvation. He has provided substitute churches for the one body of Christ (Ephesians 4:4). All of this misinformation is digested by people who fail to

study God's book and Satan destroys the attraction and appeal of the Lord's church in the minds of those who give heed to the doctrines of the devil. Those who are outside of the church are playing the devil's game the very way the devil wants them to play it, and they are running headlong to their own doom just as he desires.

### **His Second Goal**

If you are in the church, having seen the folly of the devil's attempts to keep you out, the devil wants to draw you back into the sinful world from which you have been delivered. Why? He knows, even if Baptist preachers do not, that *"the latter end is worse with them than the beginning."* (Second Peter 2:20-22). James 4:4 warns, *"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."* First John 2:15-17, *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."*

The Lord Jesus taught, *"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, or love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."* (Matthew 6:24). But the devil wants man to think the Lord is wrong about it. He would persuade people in the church that they can walk with God and walk in the sinful paths of the world at the same time without any problems to them. Many have evidently accepted this lie of the devil.

Yes, the devil uses his "missionaries," and he uses many avenues of temptation against man as man tries to be faithful to the Lord. He has proven his ability too many times for the person of reasonable mind to doubt his power. He has far too often been able to cause members of the Lord's church to backslide and as a result be lost.

We are not to think that all was done once we have believed, repented, confessed our faith, and been baptized

for the remission of sins. That is essential, but not all-sufficient. Revelation 2:10, "...but be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." We must, like Paul, keep the faith, finish the course (Second Timothy 2:4-6). For this reason we are urged to steadfastness: First Corinthians 10:12, "Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." First Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

The devil never accepts defeat until he is forced to accept it. He cannot win once life has been lived faithfully "in the Lord." Revelation 14:13, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them." Paul realized the persistence of Satan in First Corinthians 9:27, "But I keep my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

The first sign of falling away into apostasy is negligence toward the periods of worship. Many ignore Hebrews 10:25 that commands we not forsake the assembling of ourselves together. Those going the wrong direction will begin leaving out Bible study (Second Timothy 2:15), both at home and with brethren at Bible study periods. They begin to associate more and more with evil companions (First Corinthians 15:33), and renew their love for the things of this world (Second Timothy 4:10). The devil would want you misled into thinking that once you have been saved, you shall always be saved. It is true when one comes to Christ he is saved from his past sins and those sins shall never be accounted against him anymore. But that does not mean you cannot sin in the future and leave the way of salvation. Isn't it strange thing that there be those who profess to preach the gospel of Christ are busy doing the devil's deceptions telling people that once they have come to the Lord that they cannot fall? But one can fall. Why else would an inspired writer of the New Testament constantly warn against falling if such a thing was impossible anyway? Paul told some of his brethren in Galatia that they had already fallen, already had done what some



denominational preachers keep saying nobody can even do (Galatians 5:4). What an awesome day awaits those who have pretended to serve God but have declared the devil's message! A Christian can sin and when he does he needs forgiveness (First John 1:8-10).

While we cannot be perfect, nor does the Lord expect us to be sinlessly perfect, we can be faithful, and this is that which is essential to being with God in heaven. The devil wants you, the Christian, to ignore that spiritual truth.

### **His Third Goal**

But if the devil does not keep one out of the church, nor is able to get one in the church to leave the church, he still has that which he wants to accomplish. He tries to make the Christian as worthless to the cause of Christ and salvation as possible. Whatever tends toward encouraging people to be saved is what the devil wants to terminate. He tries to make the Christian worthless to the cause of Christ because he knows a bad influence from professed Christians will drive people into his wicked arms. Again, he has been far too successful.

One Christian said it correctly, "We have been saved to save." This is true. John 15:2, "*Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.*" The Christian is not to live for himself, but for Christ (Second Corinthians 5:15). Without doing good works, our faith is dead (James 2:26). It is possible that many who are in the church are of little to no value for the progress of the message of salvation, or helping the church fulfill its God-given duty.

Bearing fruit is not confined to bringing others to Christ, although this is one large part of it. It also demands daily Christian living. Actually, those who can render the church the greatest harm and hindrance are those who are members of the church but who live as if it made no difference how they live. They profess to be followers of Christ, but in reality, are often more the followers of Satan in the things they say, do, where they go, what they seek, what they support, what they

condone, where their heart lies, their ambitions, conversations, and motives.

There are doubtless too many who are truly "Sunday morning pew fillers" with their names on the church roll who think that is all that matters. If there is even one, that's too many. But what of all the other duties and privileges of being among the company of the redeemed? When brethren have to be begged to study God's Word, urged to attend periods of worship to the Father, pushed to perform every duty, nothing being done by anybody that captures their interest, what are they but drags on the cause of Christ? They cannot be saved that way, but they also present a distorted picture of what a Christian is. When members smoke, drink alcoholic beverages, lie, cheat, commit adultery, marry, divorce, and remarry without regard to the Lord's teaching on the subject, gamble, show themselves greedy, covetous, jealous, bitter, vicious, unforgiving, and possessing a foul mouth, what image do they present of Christianity? Of course, they are not being Christians like that, but they profess to be and many will judge what a Christian is by what they do. They make the devil so proud. He surely has one of his own in the midst of the people of God to undermine righteousness from within.

### **He Has His Methods of Operation**

How does the devil get church members to serve him as worthless and obstructing members? He gets them to hide their light under the bushel of worldliness. He encourages them to be satisfied with as little as they can do and still think they can "get by." He tells them the lost are not really all that lost and sin is not really all that devastating, and that maybe God will somehow save the lost even though they are not obedient. He lies to Christians so Christians will not seek the lost by convincing them that being honest and sincere is all that really matters. He preaches the false doctrine that doctrinal differences make no real difference. He convinces them that we can have "unity in diversity." He gets the self-professed scholars to declare all manner of false doctrines and because of their so-called scholarship many naive souls will accept it as true. He

has a trainload of such people like that in the schools and pulpits even as I write these words, producing lectures, books, papers, seminars, etc. that declare that God does not really mean what He has said after all. Some people will blindly follow the self-acclaimed experts.

He convinces church members that other matters of life, things of the here and now, deserve more attention, even before the Lord's church and its mission. He tells them to always make room for business, job, home, sports, games, clubs, associations, fun, frolic, etc. He creates the same old problem over and over by getting people to get their priorities mixed up. He says in essence, "After all you have to make a living." He would have people to think God does not understand that fact. He would have them forget the Lord's promise of Matthew 6:33, *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."*

One of the devil's most successful methods is to convince church members that even if they do not function, others will, and the grace of God will cover them anyway, as if the benefits of the grace of God are unconditional. But "Let George do it" has been the attitude of downfall for many baptized believers. Through compromise, and the fatal spiritual disease of going along for the sake of peace, the devil wins battle after battle.

### **Be Not Deceived By Him**

Will you let the devil persuade you? Will he be allowed to use you? Will he succeed in his ambitions regarding you? He is interested in you and seeks his way with you. Will he keep you out of the Lord's church? If not, will he draw you back into the ways of the world to your damnation? And if he fails in both of these first efforts, will you allow him to use you as a hindrance to the very cause you profess to espouse? Let none of us allow that. We are not immune to his ways, but we can retain our loyalty to the Lord. We have the choice and we must make it.

\* \* \* \* \*

## ***She Did What She Could***

Bible students are acquainted with the event in the life of Christ when "*there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head.*" (Mark 14:3),

Not everybody thought highly of what she did. Not everybody was pleased with it. Her actions did not suit all who observed it. In fact, some were even indignant at the effort she had made. Others contended that what she had done was just a waste, and suggested that something better could have been done with the ointment than what she did with it.

Poor woman! How could she possibly please everybody. The fact is she could not, and glory to God, she did not even try to please everybody. But she pleased the Lord and He commended her for the "*good work*" she had wrought on Him. While some had other ideas about her actions, the Lord considered an excellent thing.

He further commended her because He said of her, "*She hath done what she could.*" How much better would this world be if everybody would do as much? What she did, doing what she could, is still preached and is as Jesus said it would be, "*a memorial of her.*"

Helen Keller said, "I am only one; but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; I will not refuse to do the something I can do." How wonderful!

Sometimes people would discourage the saints by contending, "You can't change the world. You can't solve every problem. You can't fight every battle." That is not the point at all. You can do what you can and, believe me, if the Scripture teaches us anything, we had better be doing what we can because we shall be held accountable for that. If more would do what they could there would not be such a burden on those who are trying so hard.

JWB



## **In Death There is Great Loss**

Paul said it was gain for him to die (Philippians 1:21). We realize the spiritual gain that was his, and for all of God's saints, when they leave this life to go to be with the Father. But in death there is a great loss also, especially at the death of a knowledgeable, faithful servant of God. The great loss is suffered by those who survive and remain on the field of battle.



**JAMES W. BOYD**

Tommy Swann wrote, "When an old person dies, a library is lost." People have marvelled at transplants of human organs from one to another. What a wonder if the minds of some could be transplanted and the accumulation of knowledge and wisdom be preserved! Of course, that will never be because the mind, the heart, the soul, is absolutely individual.

Many precious brethren have died of late. We grieve at our great loss even as we rejoice in their great gain.

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

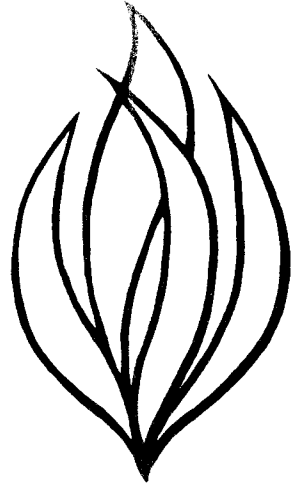
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# A Burning Fire



*"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).*



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# ***Uphold the Plea***

The Lord's church began on the first day of Pentecost after the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. The characteristics of His church are revealed to mankind in the Bible. By those characteristics the church can be identified. It is called the body of Christ, the church of God, churches of Christ, the kingdom of God, the house or family of God, and other identifications that show possession. Its members are called disciples, Christians, saints, priests and other terms found in Scripture.

The governmental organization of the church is relatively simply. Christ is the head. Members are organized into local congregations. Congregations are organized with elders having the oversight, deacons who serve, preacher and teachers, and all the membership making up the body. Each congregation is autonomous or self-governing inasmuch as there is no super-ecclesiastical organization of the Lord's church larger than a local congregation.

The creed is Christ and the written creed (meaning what is believed) is the Bible. The worship consists of singing, praying, observing the Lord's Supper, giving, and proclaiming the Word of God. The terms of entrance are hearing the Word, believing in Jesus as the Christ the Son of God, repenting of sins, confessing faith in Jesus as the Christ, and being baptized into Christ for the remission of sins by His authority (in His name).

The church is united in mind, doctrine, and practice, speaking the same things, speaking as the oracles of God, tied together by the bond of faith and fellowship in Christ.

The work of the church is to evangelize the world with the gospel, edify and build up itself (the saved), recover those who may fall away, and render benevolent and charitable deeds toward those in need as opportunity presents.

The inspired history of the early church shows the Lord's people doing the Lord's work the Lord's way. The New Testament gives us His pattern and blueprint to which we must adhere if we would be the Lord's people and do the Lord's work.

### **An Apostasy**

As prophesied, there came a falling away from the truth (First Timothy 4:1-3; Second Peter 2:1,2; Acts 20:28-30). The apostasy did not occur rapidly but gradually over a long period of time. Many of the departures from truth occurred concurrently. There was first a change in the governmental structure of the church into an ecclesiastical hierarchy. The names of the church and its members were changed. Human creeds were introduced alongside of, and then instead of, the Bible. Traditions, doctrines of men, superstitions, and combinations of truth with pagan and heathen practices perverted the church away from God's pattern. There was a change in the manner of worship, the terms of admission, the mission, purpose, and work of the church. Very little was left untouched by the apostasy.

Down through the years when these changes were taking place there were voices that cried out against them, but to no avail. Many warned of the error involved, pleaded for people not to follow men but to return to God. But they were ignored, silenced by persecution and death, intimidated into retreat and the apostasy rolled. Human history entered into the period historians call the Dark Ages.

### **Reformation**

Eventually, after several centuries, there were those who could raise their voices in opposition to the ruling powers, primarily the Roman Catholic Church, and survive. Their voices were not silenced but heard. They would not be ignored nor intimidated. Such were Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox, Ulrich Zwingli, and many others who are considered the "fathers of the Protestant Reformation."

Moving rather rapidly now over history, suffice it to say that the Reformation Movement did not reform existing Romanism as was first intended. Rather it produced Protestant denominationalism with its many names, churches, doctrines, creeds, practices, etc. All that characterizes the confused, contradictory, and chaotic religiously divided scene so evident today was produced to a great degree from the Reformation.

### **Restoration**

In the eighteenth century men began to see the gross inconsistency of denominationalism. They began the plea for a return to New Testament Christianity. They urged people to go back behind denominationalism, the apostasy, all the way back to "thus saith the Lord" of the Scriptures. They urged that men preach what was preached then, speak as the oracles of God, speak where the Bible speaks, be silent where the Bible is silent, require what Scripture requires, neither add to nor take from what the Bible teaches, recognize the Bible as the all-sufficient religious authority it claims to be (Second Timothy 3:16,17).

Prominent men involved in this plea that had its beginning in Europe but found fertile soil in America were James O'Kelly, Elias Smith, Abner Jones, Barton W. Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, and a host of others. Their plea was based on the irrefutable principle of sowing and reaping, sowing the seed of the kingdom, the Word of God, into hearts as was done in New Testament times. What the seed produced then it would produce again.

Such a plea captured the attention of thousands upon thousands. Many battles were fought and won against the die-hards of denominationalism. The Lord's Church was restored, and that period has come to be known as the early days of the Restoration Movement.

### **More Seeds of Error Are Sown**

Unfortunately, the dark clouds of Satanic apostasy raised other storms for the church to endure. Two vastly different approaches were adopted toward the Bible. One

said we are permitted to do whatever the Bible does not specifically prohibit. The other says that we are to do what we do "*in the name of Christ*," which means by His authority (Colossians 3:17). Second John nine forbids transgressing the doctrine of Christ, but binds abiding in the doctrine of Christ. This was the unsuppressible contention of faithful brethren.

These two approaches finally produced division over such innovations as the missionary society and instrumental music, neither of which has authority from Scripture. One was a organization separate and apart from the church that assumed to do the work of the church that rivaled the church. The other was wrong because it added another kind of music in worship than that which God had repeatedly commanded and authorized.

Since these original divisive intrusions into the otherwise growing restoration efforts of the Lord's Church, there have been more innovations, such as the church becoming involved in politics, entertainment, secular education, fun and games evangelism, observance of "holy days," women preachers, raising funds through raffles, rummage sales, etc. rather than the free-will offerings as Scripture teaches. Those who launched upon the sea of digression modestly and cautiously have drifted so far away from the shores of truth that they now admit to being nothing but a denomination among denominations, practicing open membership, not even requiring what the Bible teaches is absolutely necessary to be considered a child of God, adopting all manner of false doctrines, and on it goes.

Years and years of faithful labor was plowed under by liberal digressives and apostate people and their ways. Entire congregations, properties, preachers, members were taken away from the loyal and faithful plea of staying with the Bible, and they went their own way, the way of the world, and "did their own thing." The real tragedy of this and any other apostasy is the loss of souls. One cannot be saved and defy God and His will.

### **But Truth Rises Again**

Even so, the remnant remained and the church began to grow and prosper once again until, numerically, it outnumbered the digressive elements that spring from the departure of restoration principles.

But history has a way of repeating itself. Today, even as these words are written, some of the same false ideas, practices, innovations, organizations, attitudes and doctrines are dividing the church. The wail is "unity in diversity," which simply means agreeing to disagree and "do your own thing." We hear of "new hermeneutics," which is neither new nor hermeneutics, but denial of truth. Change is the watchword regardless of why. Compromise is the fashion. "Go along to get along" replaces conviction. Schools, large metropolitan churches, "big name" preachers, brotherhood papers are all calling for the relaxation of the plea to stay with the Book, but learn to practice a pseudo-love by tolerating whatever anybody wants so long as they are honest and sincere, regardless of the revealed will of God in Scripture.

The cause of restoration is noble and right, but it suffers from the Lord's enemies, being allowed again to be retarded, splintered, abandoned, in order to become accepted by the world and large numerically.

### **The Only Way to Unity**

The only way to unity is faithfulness to God and hold tenaciously to the teaching to "*speak as the oracles of God.*" (First Peter 4:11). There must be Bible authority for what we say, believe, and practice, because the Bible is the sole authority. Unity based on truth is the only true unity. The plea shall never be outdated nor irrelevant. It is our sacred duty before God and man to uphold this plea regardless of the cost to ourselves and those around us.

\* \* \* \* \*

# Meeting God

Amos 4:12,13, *"Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel. For, lo, he that formeth the mountains, and createth the wind, and declareth unto man what is his thought, that maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth, The Lord, The God of hosts, is his name."*

This text is sometimes used to encourage preparation for judgment day. Emphasis is placed on the phrase, *"Prepare to meet thy God."* The necessity to prepare for the judgment when Christ returns is stressed in both the Old and New Testaments, but this is not the primary theme of the prophet here. There is another very important lesson taught here.

The context and background of this passage is important to understanding it. Israel was in rebellion against God. God, through Amos, reminds Israel of what God had done in the way of punishing men and nations who chose to defy Him. Moab, Edom, Ammon, Syria, the Philistines, Nineveh, Sodom, Gomorrah, the world before the flood are mentioned in Scripture as recipients of God's wrath because of rebellion and defiance of the Almighty. *"Thus will I do unto thee, O Israel."* This was God's warning if they repented not. They would experience the same doom and penalty as others.

## Meeting God

The phrase, *"Prepare to meet thy God,"* is figurative language. There are different ways one can meet God. Here it depicts a battle scene, a confrontation. By Israel's conduct God has been challenged. Now God gives His answer to that challenge. He tells them to meet Him in battle, meet Him on the issues wherein they had defied Him and rebelled against Him. They should put themselves on guard. When men challenge the authority and power of God, God accepts the challenge. Before He deals with them, however, He warns the defiant ones.

Amos is appealing to Israel before deciding to continue their rebellion and challenge of God to take another look at the One they are opposing. They are making themselves the opponent of "*The Lord God of hosts.*" The word "*hosts*" means armies. God of hosts means the God of armies and of battle. It is a statement of power. The prophet pleaded for Israel not to array themselves against God. The emphasis is on the futility and sure disaster that will follow when one places himself on the opposite side of God. Having given this warning, Amos reminds Israel of certain things about God which serve as His reasons why they should not continue rebelling.

### **Omnipotent**

The first reason is because God is omnipotent, or all-powerful. Amos cites His creative power. "*He... formeth the mountains and createth the winds.*" The existence of the physical world argues for His reality and power.

Science is a study of the physical world that God has created. Science, true science, is demonstrated information as it pertains to the physical world. It is not true scientific knowledge unless it can be demonstrated. Guesses are no more than that.

On the other hand, the Bible is God's revelation to man pertaining to the spiritual world, primarily. Although the Bible is not designed to be a science book, it is not unscientific, nor anti-scientific, but in many instances it is pre-scientific in its revelations concerning matters with which science deals. The Bible revealed certain scientific truths about the physical world before man could know it was true through science, discovery, experiment, etc.

We live in a highly scientific age, and right thinking people appreciate the benefits of scientific progress. But there is no contradiction between what science can prove and what the Bible teaches, even in matters of scientific nature. God is the author of the book and the Creator of the world. We would not expect there to be contradictions between the two. Sometimes scientists become very unscientific and enter the field of speculation and philosophy and suggest anti-Biblical ideas. Sometimes

Bible students fail to understand the Biblical message and misinterpret certain passages in a way that contradicts what science can demonstrate. But when scientists stay with what can be proved, and Bible students stay with the message of God, there is no clash, but consistent harmony. The idea of "Science versus the Bible" was born of the clash between misinterpretations of the Bible and science, or pseudo-science and the Bible.

### **Pre-scientific**

Notice a few pre-scientific pieces of information found in the Bible. The five fundamental elements of science-time, space, matter, force, and motion - are all in Genesis 1:1. Moses, not having a laboratory, knew this because of divine revelation from the One who created all things. It was not ancient wisdom and knowledge of his day that caused him to write this way.

Moses said God gathered all the seas (oceans) into one place or bed. Science knows all oceans are literally connected, gathered into one bed. Here is a statement of scientific fact of which Moses could not have possibly known through travel, experiment, etc. Only by divine revelation could this have been declared.

In Job chapter thirty-eight over forty questions of scientific subjects are mentioned for which Job had no source of information other than God.

Job 26:7 tells of the starless northern sky long before men with telescopes proved it so. So is the matter of the rotundity of the earth, the rotation of the earth on its axis, the paths or currents in the oceans, the cycle of evaporation and rainfall, the sound of light, and many geographical facts for which there was no measure at the time of writing. Written from revelation rather than experimentation and personal investigation, God, who made such things, revealed them unto man. All this demonstrates the power of God. Amos was warning Israel not to oppose such a One as God. How could they expect to be successful in that?

### **Omniscient**



A second reason not to oppose God is because God is omniscient or all-knowing. He can even know man's thoughts, man's mind, his motives that lie in the inner recesses of his heart.

God's knowledge embraced the prophetic statements that were prophesied hundreds of years before they were fulfilled. Only an all-knowing Being could foretell with unerring accuracy that which would come to pass. In many instances, even minute details were predicted and fulfilled.

One significance of Jewish history is that it was written in prophecy fifteen hundred years before it occurred. The coming of Christ, with all the facts about His life on earth, of the tribe of Judah, of the family of David, would be born in Bethlehem, His humble circumstances, His teaching by parables, His betrayal, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, all were foretold. There are so many specific points regarding Christ that literally occurred. But those who spoke for God foretold them centuries prior to the events.

Prophecy and the fulfillment of it is an unimpeachable evidence of the divine origin of the Bible. No man or group of men could have known such things, or produced such a document without divine guidance. We might illustrate the work of the prophets in the foretelling of events as if they were marksmen with bows and arrows, shooting from different distances, toward a target they could not see, in darkness that prevented their vision, and yet, when light is shed on the target after they all have shot their arrows, each of the arrows are in the middle of the target. Who would consider this a mere accidental or coincidental occurrence?

Moses lived fifteen hundred years before Christ and "shot" prophecies regarding Christ. David, one thousand years before Christ, did the same. They were followed by Daniel, six hundred years prior to Christ, and then came Malachi, four hundred years before Christ. All of the prophets contributed to the prophetic revelation. Then when the light of the truth of the New Testament is turned on Christ, every prophecy is fulfilled. Amos was

pleading with his Israelite brethren not to array themselves against such a One.

### **Omnipresence**

The third reason Amos cited not to fight against God was because God is omnipresent, or present everywhere. He "*maketh the morning darkness, and treadeth upon the high places of the earth.*" The mountains are His stepping-stones. He exists in light and darkness alike. Here the reader would enhance his appreciation of the ever-presence of God to pause to read Psalm 139:1-2.

Amos exhorts Israel that those who oppose God are on the wrong side. The challenge to prepare to meet God, in open confrontation, is a warning for them not to be so foolish as to attempt it. Preparing to meet God in the sense of overcoming Him is a fatal mistake.

### **Another Preparation**

Preparing to meet God in order to be with Him, to come to Him, is as rewarding as opposing Him is fatal. The Old and New Testaments speak of the "*habitation of God*" where God has residence and men may meet Him on favorable terms. Exodus 20:24 tells us that God records His name where the sacrifices are made. This would be the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34), and the temple (First Kings 9:3). In the New Testament the church is the habitation of God, His temple (Ephesians 2:22). It is here where God and man meet in fellowship.

Only in the Lord's church can we be with God (Revelation 21:3). Outside of God's habitation we stand opposed to Him, and have no more possibility of success than Israel. Nobody can prepare to successfully oppose God.

How will you meet God? Will it be to fight against Him, or to be with Him? Each shall face God in the judgment. How it will be depends on how we react to the Lord's invitation to obey the gospel, being saved and added to His body, the church.

\* \* \* \* \*

# ***Peace on Earth; Good Will Toward Men***

The reader is urged to read Luke 2:1-15 for background material and the text for this lesson. Space demands that we ask you to do this.

The text is a familiar one to Bible students. Especially is this text heard during what is called the Christmas season. The concept of peace, good will are cherished by many people. In a world overrunning with strife, turmoil, wars, struggle, hatred, the very tone of the words ,“peace and good will,” bring a measure of solace.

But many have sorely missed the mark in the application of this text. It has to do with the mission of Christ to this earth, but not in the way many think. What is the peace mentioned here? What is the good will? Unless we consider the passage in its context, we will likely misapply this Scripture as many others have done and lose its true significance. People have assigned meanings to it to their liking, like the idea of “getting along with your neighbor.” While this idea may be distantly suggested, this is not the import of the praises uttered by the heavenly hosts at the birth of Christ.

I read where one wrote, “This portrays a vision of a time when people can live and children can grow up in a world that is not threatening to destroy them.” This is a false commentary and is not suggested in the passage. Such smacks more of some premillennial utopia here on earth. That is not what the Bible teaches.

Isaiah 9:6, “*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.*” Jesus is called the “*Prince of Peace*” in prophecy. The gospel is called the gospel of peace (Romans 10:15). The kingdom

of God is one of joy and peace (Romans 14:17). The preaching done by the apostles and early evangelists was about peace by Jesus Christ (Acts 10:36). God is said to be the author of peace (First Corinthians 14:33). The birth of Jesus was heralded as the coming of peace (Our Text).

### **What Peace?**

But what is the peace that Christ brought to this world? At the very time these words, "*Peace on earth,*" were spoken by the heavenly hosts, the world was at peace among nations. It was in a period of the Roman Empire when there was no record of wars going anywhere. Since His birth there has been much strife, wars, struggles, etc. Some, seeing this and thinking that Jesus was to bring peace among the nations, have rejected Christ. Are we to expect a world of tranquility and a cessation of all tensions, the end of strife, the termination of all wars, because Christ brought peace? We will not expect this if we understand the peace He actually brought.

What did Jesus mean in Matthew 10:34-36? "*Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against the mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.*" How can Christ bring peace, and yet, not bring peace? Obviously, there is more than one kind of peace. What kind of peace did Christ bring?

Romans 5:1, "*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" The peace that was brought to this earth by Christ is peace with God. This is a spiritual peace that can be ours regardless of the circumstances and conditions in the world around us. This is more than mere contentment and ease of mind. It is a relationship with God.

Man alienates himself from God by sin (Isaiah 59:1,2). Christ came and is our peace (Ephesians 2:14). He preached peace (Ephesians 2:17). He died in order to reconcile man to God, providing the way of forgiveness of man's sins that alienated him from God (Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:20). We are reconciled to God by Jesus

Christ (Second Corinthians 5:18,19). Christ made reconciliation for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:17). The peace Jesus brought has to do with the removal of the sins of mankind. Seeking this peace with God may often bring one into conflict with other people.

### **Not World Peace**

The praises spoken by the heavenly hosts at His birth did not promise a world free of struggle. Rather it was the announcement of the coming of the way for man to be reconciled to God. Christ did not come to merely provide peace between men. He came to provide peace between man and God. As men are reconciled to Christ, they can and will be reconciled to each other. But a social and community peace was not His prime goal.

To be sure, peace, in the sense of harmony and tranquility among men, is a very desirable condition. But peace between men can be attained while men are spiritually lost, living in sin, even rejecting Christ, and denying God. There are many who care nothing for God and His Son who have peace among themselves. Men can stand arm in arm, hand in hand, heart in heart in a social peace and still be very rebellious and alienated from God. Consider how heathen and atheistic nations have a measurable peace among themselves.

Peace between people does not always follow Christ. Did not some reject Him during His life on earth? Did not strife and struggle follow Him? Some accepted Him while others rejected Him. There will ever be strife between the two. From this there is no escape. The birth of Jesus Christ brought a struggle into the world rather than social peace. It is easy to see why following Christ is sometimes described as a warfare, a spiritual warfare, a fight and battle against evil, spiritual forces. The forces of God are at odds against the forces of Satan and so shall they ever be. Because of this, even though we are to try to live in peace with all men, it is not always possible (Romans 12:18).

The emphasis of the words, "*Peace on earth*," is that Jesus Christ came to offer man the way of salvation and

to be at peace with Deity. It is another way of saying He came to seek and save the lost.

### **Whose Good Will?**

*"Good will toward men"* is an expression of God's love manifested toward man. Just as the coming of Christ was to bring spiritual peace between man and God, so was His coming a demonstration of God's good will toward an undeserving humanity. The phrase rings with the same meaning as John 3:16, Romans 5:6-8, Ephesians 2:8. God's mercy, grace, love, kindness, unmerited favor toward mankind is seen in the sending of His Son to earth to live and die on behalf of the salvation of man who could not atone for his own sins.

So often we think of the phrase, *"Good will toward men,"* as describing the mission of Christ as bringing men together that they might get along in society with each other and be considerate toward one another. We put the phrase in the context of people having a good attitude toward other people. It is true that as two people follow Christ they will develop good will toward each other. But all do not follow Christ. This is only a secondary by-product of the mission of Christ. Jesus did not come to establish a religion that simply enabled people to get along together. That is one of the faults and mistakes of what is called the "social gospel." We recognize that converting people to Christ, offers the greatest hope for the recovery of man in his economic, political, social, and other mundane relationships. But the good will expressed in our text is far more than that. The heavenly hosts were not expressing what we might want between people. They were rather praising God for the magnanimous overflow of His grace as He showed that grace by sending His Son to dwell as a man among men to save them from their sins.

### **Vertical**

The real significance of the phrase, *"Peace on earth; good will toward men,"* has a meaning much deeper than the superficial calmness and composure on the man-to-man relationship. It is more than a horizontal matter. It is rather vertical. It is a phrase having to do with the

God-man relationship. The birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was the occasion for the accomplishment of the divinely-given provisions of the way of salvation and spiritual peace for mankind with His Creator and Judge. It was the disclosure and revelation of God's benevolence, kindness, and love for mankind. It revealed God's readiness to forgive and to save.

All the glory, praise, and honor for such things belongs to the most high God, the God in the highest, the God of heaven. With a proper understanding and appreciation of the words, "*Peace on earth; good will toward men,*" we can heartily join the chorus of the heavenly hosts in the praise, "*Glory to God in the highest.*"

But who will be wise enough to take advantage of what God has offered? Who will come to enjoy this peace with God so extended through God's good will? Will you be among that number? You can be, but only by coming to Christ through obedience to the gospel. This calls for faith in Christ as the Son of God, repentance of sins, confession of that faith, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. This is precisely what the Bible says we must do. We urge one and all to submit to God's Word.

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## ***Anger Without Sin***

Ephesians 4:26, "*Be ye angry and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.*" This is one of nearly five hundred Biblical references to anger, being angry, and wrath. Students of human behavior recognize anger as one of the most powerful emotions in the disposition of mankind. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Bible has much to say about it.

What is anger? It is a synonym for rage, fury, indignation, wrath, emotional excitement induced by intense displeasure. The intensity of anger is usually proportionate to the intensity of the displeasure. It is an unpleasant emotion. Anger can be moderated and

tempered by varying degrees of self-control and self-discipline. Anger is commonplace among people and manifests itself in many ways.

Some have the idea that becoming angry is sinful in itself. They equate anger with a lack of self-control and parallel being angry with the loss of temper. This is a mistaken notion. Sometimes, far too often, anger and lack of control go together, but not necessarily so. If it is true that being angry is sinful, then we have a real contradiction in the Bible because Christ became angry, but He never sinned. How can we understand the anger of the Lord, His apostles, and others? Christ, when angered, did not sin. Numerous times the apostles manifested anger in response to provocation, yet, did not sin. The text teaches that one can be angry and not sin.

Anger can be wrong and often is allowed to become sin. Anger certainly provides opportunity for sin. Anger is wrong when it is without provocation or for a justified reason. It is wrong to become angry over matters that do not warrant anger. Many temptations to sin confront us when we are angry that will not confront us under other conditions. But the Bible makes it clear that there is a difference between anger and sin just as there is a difference between all unpleasant circumstances and sin.

### **The Anger of God**

We read of the anger and wrath of God, Christ, and the apostles. But when were they angry? What made them angry? Why were they angry? How did they behave when angry? When we learn these things we will learn about acceptable anger in contrast with sinful anger.

Studying the Scriptures that speak of the anger of God, we see His anger can be properly defined as righteous indignation. The Lord, because of His perfectness and holiness, His standard of righteousness, is angry at certain things. Nehemiah 9:17, *"...but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness..."* God is not quick to be angry nor hasty to manifest or execute His wrath. Nahum 1:3, *"The Lord is slow to anger."* But in verse six, *"Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness*



*of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him.*" The Scriptures also speak of His anger and wrath being hot, fiery, rendered with fury, kindled, and smoking. God is a God of wrath and anger.

### **Why Is God Angry?**

What makes God angry? Surely, we ought to be angry at that which makes God angry. Exodus 22:22-24, *"Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless."*

Exodus 32:10, when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai and the people were practicing idolatry, *"Now therefore let me alone that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them; and I will make of thee a great nation."*

Grumbling and complaining provoked God's anger. Numbers 11:10, *"Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent; and the anger of the Lord was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased."*

### **Some With Whom God Is Angry**

Ezra 8:22 shows God's anger against those that forsake Him. *"His power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him."* Second Chronicles 28:11, *"Now hear me therefore, and deliver the captives again, which you have taken captive of your brethren: for the fierce wrath of the Lord is upon you."* God was angry at those who were angry against His people. He is angry against the heathen (Psalm 79:6). He is angry at those who go their own way (Psalm 106:39,40). The hypocrite is the object of His anger (Job 36:13; Matthew 23).

John 3:36, *"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not on the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."* God is angry toward the disobedient (Colossians 3:5,6). His anger was against Moses when Moses offered excuses for not doing

as God told him (Exodus 4:14). Numbers 22:22 teaches God is angry toward those like Balaam who are willing to compromise with evil. Joshua 7:1, God was angry at Israel when there was sin in the camp until corrected.

Jesus looked with anger on those whose hearts were hardened against the truth (Mark 3:5). Twice He cleansed the temple (Matthew 12:21), and demonstrated a physical expression of anger toward those who desecrated the Father's house. The cruel, rebellious evildoers are the object of divine wrath because of what they do. God does not lose His temper or self-control. He is in full possession of Himself and what He does, yet, angered.

### **Are We Angry Like Him?**

Seeing how God is angered at certain things, and since we are His children, will not these things also provoke anger within us? Is God pleased if we look with indifference at that which angers Him? Children of God do not take lightly or passively things which provoke God's wrath.

One British author said of himself and his work, "The tribute I am most eager to deserve is one that would say I am among those who will not take evil good-naturedly." A hindrance to truth comes from alleged friends of God who "take evil good-naturedly." God does not do that! The ability to become indignant at sin is Christlike.

### **The Warning**

Seeing anger is not sin, we must heed the warning regarding it and "*sin not*." Misdirected anger, without control, or with an evil motive, produces sin. Anger in defense of error is misguided. Anger that manifests itself in profanity, vengeance, saying and doing evil, is to be avoided. The Bible speaks of sinful anger that accomplishes no good but only harm. Genesis four, Cain was angry at Abel. Jonah four, Jonah was angry because God did not destroy Nineveh. But God "*repented*" or changed His mind when the people repented, changed their minds about sin. Jonah seems to have preferred destruction of them to salvation for them.

Luke fifteen, the elder brother's anger was born of jealousy. Matthew 21:46 and Luke 4:28,29 speaks of anger of the Pharisees and others who sought to destroy Jesus because the truth He taught applied to them, and they refused to accept it. Many get angry at preachers today for about the same reason.

Exodus 32:19, "*Moses' anger waxed hot.*" He was reckless in throwing down the tablets of stone upon which God had engraved the commandments. John 7:23, there was anger toward Jesus because He healed a man on the Sabbath Day. Anger was demonstrated against the apostles, such as stoning, imprisonment, beheadings, other persecutions. Such is sinful anger.

Let us cite other passages for additional study on the subject that pertains to sinful anger. Proverbs 15:18; 16:32; 19:19; 27:3,4; 29:8; Ecclesiastes 7:9; Matthew 5:22; Ephesians 4:31,32; Colossians 3:8; Titus 1:7; James 1:19,20.

### Summary

As Ephesians 4:26 requires, learn what deserves anger and what does not. Learn to exercise anger with self-control and temperance. Avoid sinful anger and sinful manifestations of anger. Satan can use your anger if you permit it. But anger can be a blessing to you and to those around you when kept within the limits and boundaries of the Word of God. Let us work in developing the ability to be angry, using anger for righteousness' sake, but avoiding the sins that so often can and do accompany anger that gets out of control.

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**There must have been some liberals** present at the contest between Elijah and the false prophets of Baal. When challenged to defend what they said, Scripture reads, "*And the people answered him not a word.*" (First Kings 18:21). You try to be fair with a liberal and ask him to back up what he loudly proclaims, his best and only defense is to act like those people. When truth was shown by Elijah the people accepted it. But not liberals!

# ***Can We Afford Biblical Ignorance?***

There are so many Scriptures dealing with the necessity of Biblical knowledge that we must confine ourselves to but a few in any one study. If the amount of Scripture pertaining to a subject is any measure of emphasis on the theme, then the knowledge of the Bible is one of the most emphatic teachings of the Bible. We shall center our thoughts on whether we can afford the "luxury" of not knowing the Bible. Is knowledge of the Bible an optional, take-it-or-leave-it matter? Can we afford it as an individual, or as a nation? There is a price that must be paid to have knowledge. Are we willing to pay it? There is also a price to be paid for ignorance. Are we willing to pay that?

Isaiah and Hosea were prophets of God during the same historical period some seven to eight hundred years before Christ. But they labored in different geographical areas. Isaiah worked in Judah in the south while Hosea was in the northern area of Israel. They faced common problems and their messages were similar. The same sins existed in both nations. They received about the same reaction from the people. The most prevalent sin among the people and at the root of their problems was ignorance of the will of God.

## **Isaiah 1:2-6**

*In Isaiah 1:2,3, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken. I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know; my people doth not consider."*

The ox and ass are among the least intelligent animals. Yet, the ox knew his owner and the ass knew the source of his supply. But the people of Judah were not only ignorant of the will of their Father, but were unwilling

to be otherwise. They "*doth not consider*," that is, were not concerned.

The mistake that they were making is the same mistake that many are making today. As Isaiah, and all the prophets showed, the people were too busy in a society of relative plenty, enjoying their pleasure, centering their lives on earthly affairs, having neither the time or interest in being students of God's holy precepts.

Their rebellious attitude and ignorance of the Word of God had its results. Isaiah 1:4-6, "*Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward. Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.*"

They had forsaken the Lord, provoking His wrath. Rather than making progress, as they had deceived themselves into thinking, "*they are gone backward.*" Does this not picture so much around us, even the liberal apostasy among some in the church in our time? The "*head is sick, and the whole heart faint.*"

In their ignorance, Isaiah was inspired to write that they would revolt more and more. Those who know not the truth of God have no deterrent to their continued rebellion. The ultimate result is seen in verse seven, "*Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers.* He went on to tell how their land would become as Sodom and Gomorrah.

### **Isaiah 1:10**

Not only was Judah's problem presented in this first chapter, but also the solution to their problem is found there. Verse ten, "*Hear the word of the Lord... give ear unto the law of our God.*" God did not want their assemblies while they were partaking of their sins. He

did not want their sacrifices while they remained in their abominations. Rather, Isaiah 1:16-20, *“Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil. Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye will be willing, and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land; but if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”*

Knowledge, coupled with obedience, would bring blessings just as surely as ignorance coupled with rebellion spelled their doom. Do we learn the lesson now, or do we learn it later in our destruction?

### **Hosea Four**

In Hosea four, this tenderhearted prophet preached to his people in Northern Israel. He probably lived to see Israel humiliated, swallowed by the invading Assyrians, and taken into captivity that permanently removed that nation from the scene.

Why did this happen? Hosea 4:6, *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forsaken the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.”*

This was the nation that had heard such great prophets as Elijah, Elisha, Amos, and others. Admonitions, instructions, warnings galore had been sounded throughout the land for generations. There was no excuse for their ignorance. Opportunity had been theirs repeatedly to return to God. Their ignorance was willful and deliberate.

Again, we need to be reminded why they were so willing and deliberate in their ignorance. It bears repetition because it is not unlike many today. Verse seven, *“As they were increased, so they sinned against me: therefore will I change their glory into shame.”* In their prosperity

we see what low levels of living they had reached. Hosea 4:1 says there was not truth in the land, no mercy, no knowledge of God. Swearing, lying, killing, stealing, adultery, blood-letting were their characteristics. When the knowledge of God's truth makes its exit from a people, the door is opened for the entrance of anything and everything vile and corrupt. Shades of our time!

The prophets would plead, "*Hear the word of Jehovah.*" But the people gave no heed. The national pulse beat grew weaker and weaker until the death of the nation was inescapable. What a high price to pay for ignorance of God's will! Ignorance demands its price and will extract it from those who are content to remain so.

### **Only to the Willing**

A working knowledge of God's will comes only to those who are willing to pay the price in study, work, meditation, research, and devotion. No generation has had a monopoly on Biblical ignorance. But it is blatantly obvious that Biblical ignorance is at flood-tide in our time, and that is probably the most damning influence in the land, yea, the world. Biblical ignorance is the reason atheism exists. It is the foundation of the "new morality." It supports rebellion against authority, the rioting, drunkenness, prejudice, hatred, and uncontrolled crime. It all finds fertile soil in minds which know not and care not for the will of the Lord.

The conditions in Northern Israel as cited by Hosea, and those in Judah mentioned by Isaiah, are disturbingly similar to reports being published concerning our land. The law of God, being unalterably true, must be learned, respected, and obeyed. Seeking God's forgiveness through His Son, Jesus Christ, and resolving to let His way be the way we will go is the one and only preservation for our people. Unless we, the people, cease striving for pleasure, riches, satisfaction of the flesh above the holy and sacred things of God, how shall we escape what has overwhelmed nations of the past? Can we walk the pathway of desolation and degeneracy and not experience the same results that others have experienced who preceded us? Is there any real reason to believe that we shall somehow be the first people to successfully

repeat the law of sowing and reaping? (Galatians 6:7,8); Proverbs 14:34).

### **First Corinthians and Romans**

Two passages from Paul's inspired pen we want to mention convey a similar thought. First Corinthians 10:11, "*Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.*" Romans 15:4, "*For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope.*"

Will we become simply another land, another people, worse than the ox and ass, and pay the high cost of low living that comes from Biblical ignorance? Does it not concern us that even our governmental agencies, the educational systems, the various elements of the media are attempting to crush from the minds of all they can reach the good influence of the Biblical message? Even religions are joining forces with admitted servants of the devil to retard knowledge of the Bible.

Or shall we determine that we shall learn, follow, and propagate the message of God to the world whose "*head is sick, and those heart is faint?*" The hour is late, and we are already seeing the price of Biblical ignorance being exacted in our society. It just takes one or two generations for truth to be removed from the minds of a society. We are already down the road of disaster a long way in many, many circles. What this means for our children and grandchildren should concern everyone. The only solution is Christ, and the only ones who shall proclaim Christ are those of us who say we believe He is the Son of God. In what way will you contribute to the advance of the cause of Christ among those around you?

\* \* \* \* \*

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## **Redefining for Digression**

Words have meaning. But those who seek to take the church into realms of apostasy by their heresies redefine words to suit their goals. There is nothing wrong with the word, "change." But the change they seek is to change God's law to suit man. The word, "love," has long been abused to now mean acceptance of whatever anybody wants, unless they want the difference between right and wrong. Those kind of people are not to be "loved" as those who tolerate sin. "Progress" is a favorable word, usually. But some mistakenly confuse what it is to progress with digress. Even "worship" is now said to call for the "Holy Wow!" What next? Changing words to suit their aim is the way of the transgressor, but the God's Word does not change to suit the whims of men.



**JAMES W. BOYD**

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

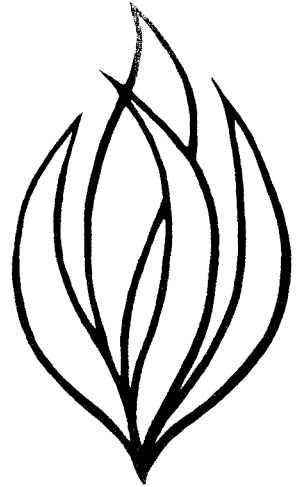
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# A Burning Fire



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



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# **Why Are We Losing Our Children?**

We properly make great efforts to take the gospel to the whole world. Many noble deeds and sacrifices are being made by many people in this effort. God will bless them for it! At the same time, while it is not true of all, many are losing their children. Leaders in the church have suffered such losses. Compare the number of small children in Bible study with the number of young people in the teenage and young adult classes and you can see that somewhere along the line we have many "drop-outs." Faithful brethren who labor among the youth warn of the increasing apostasy among the young, the lack of genuine spirituality, a growing Biblical ignorance, disrespect for Biblical authority, and either the inability or unwillingness to stand for the truth even when taught. Again, we want to say this is not an indictment of all. But it is true of many, even many who have been reared in what we consider Christian homes.

From what are they being lost? To what are they being lost? They are being lost from the church, truth, efforts to restore New Testament Christianity in every generation. They are being lost to other religions, denominations, non-religion, anti-religion, atheistic and worldly pursuits. Many who are retained are lukewarm and indifferent. Some have estimated that as high as fifty per cent of our young people, "reared in the church," are leaving. What is being lost are precious souls. These are souls with good opportunity to go to heaven settling into a course of life that leads to hell.

Why is this drain taking place? Can we plug it before others go that way? Some years ago I spent several months inquiring, reading, interviewing, questioning young people, parents, teachers, anyone who has much to do with the spiritual life of the young, seeking answers to this problem. An analysis of my findings show there are a number of factors that are contributing to the loss of our young.

## **It Starts in the Home**

Basically, the attitude and action of the home dominates the scene. The fault lies there more than any other place. We like to blame everybody and everything other than where the blame really lies. There is no profit in that approach. The home is not the sole cause, but it is probably the prime cause of the loss of the young. We need to take this medicine and do something about it. Parents cannot "play church," putting other things first, and then expect their young to put God first. It seldom happens. Parents have failed so often to teach by word and example what a Christian should be.

God placed the prime responsibility of spiritual training of a child on parents (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4; Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 11:19). We need to study, not just passively read, these verses. The first business of every parent is to see to it that the child knows God and his duty to God.

Parents display such attitudes that are sickening and disgusting. "They are young only once. Let them have their fun and good times." We need to learn that no time is a good time that does not put God first. To indulge the young is detrimental to them. They become ill-equipped to meet their sacred duties. This attitude implies that it is unpleasant to serve God. It is just a deprivation. It suggests that there is plenty of time someday to learn about God. To say they are young only once suggests that possibly God does not know that. Yet God says, Ecclesiastes 12:1, "*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth.*"

## **What Do You Expect?**

Can we rear a child fifteen or so years in the atmosphere where God, the church, truth, Christianity, morality are secondary to school, games, television, pleasure, movies, etc. and expect them to be grounded in first things first? Children are taught at home what is of prime importance.

Can we allow children to pursue social interests, conform to the crowd, seek popularity, engage in

unchristian recreation, lasciviousness behavior, filling their minds with the moral trash produced by the degenerate minds of the movie, magazine, and television industries, and expect them to love the pure, noble, moral and clean things of life?

Can we hold out to them the idea that "success" is financial success, acceptance, worldly recognition, and expect them to follow the Christ who never sought such things?

Too many parents have neglected to teach and demonstrate in their own lives the loyalty God expects from a Christian. Yet, somehow, they think their children will seek what is good above all else. Yes, the problem of losing our young is first and foremost, above all else, a reflection of the home.

### **Other Situations**

Some young people are lost when they enter into circumstances that discourage Christianity. Sometimes it may be unavoidable, such as when they might be forced from home into the armed forces. The trials are hard and they need every encouragement and prayer. Many are lost, or at least show their lack of concern for Christ, during the years when they seek higher formal education at colleges and universities where God and His will are considered irrelevant and stupid. Take a young boy or girl out of high school and sit him at the feet of some "wise" scoffer and mocker who take shots at God all the time, teaching infidelity as if he knew everything, it certainly has a detrimental effect on many youths. They hear the truth ridiculed and they do not know enough truth to resist the error, nor are they in a position to be able to defend it even if they were informed. The devil has many of his servants in the chairs of learning in our educational systems.

### **A Major Drain**

Others are lost by disregarding the Lord's teaching regarding marriage. They marry outside the church and are further drawn away from the truth. They ignore God's laws on marriage and divorce (too often having

been led astray by false teachers in the church regarding this subject), and once finding themselves in a bad circumstance, they remain there rather than please God and repent of their sinful state and come out of it. Often young people are subjected to a divided home religiously, or to one or both parents being indifferent toward God. This has destroyed the faith that could and should have been nurtured.

Still others become the victims of those who constantly berate the Lord's church, criticize it, belittle it, and reduce it to nothing more than a denomination among denominations that needs restructuring. These liberal, lying, "new lights," often speak of the church as being out-of-date, answering questions nobody is asking, lacking love, full of tradition, hypocritical, stagnant, etc. How can any person constantly hear that Satanic barrage and have respect for the church? They lose interest when they are convinced of such harangue. Such critics often cater to, adopt, and admire the message and methods of denominations. They like to impress the young with their sensationalism, emotionalism, promotionalism, "jive talk," unorthodox dress and conduct. They create and then exploit what they call the "generation gap," and wean the young away from the wise counsel of faithful parents, godly elders, sound gospel preachers. They call for an abandonment of the past, whatever it was, and an adoption of the "new" even if it is not true.

### **Negligent Older People**

Parents and church leaders and teachers too often sit idly by, complacent, gullible, naive, even cooperating with such things, and uproot the sound and solid religious heritage our young deserve. That heritage includes faith in God, love for family, love for the church of the Bible, the sanctity of the home, conformity to God's standards of morality. Too many young are being served huge helpings of modernism, immorality, compromise, permissiveness, foul speech, Marxism, anarchy, rebellion, "down with everything, and up with nothing." The "do your own thing" attitude has captured the souls of many, and this "go along to get along"



sickness that is often evident among some older people has taken many of the young away from God.

These critics of God's way are sometimes politicians whose personal lives are in shambles, educators who worship at the altar of their own wisdom, the social gospel clergymen who do not have much regard for the soul of man or his eternal destiny. Some act more like brotherhood "fun and games" directors who are called "youth ministers," who think it is the work of the church to provide playgrounds, gymnasiums, pleasure trips, etc., and put their emphasis there. Many "youth seminars" have been little more than sessions to convince the youth that the elderships, gospel preachers, and parents who hold to the Word of God, are "irrelevant." Too many youth leaders impose the adventuresome, inquisitive spirit of youth to exploring paths that have repeatedly proven digressive. The efforts of godly and determined Christian parents have no more deadly enemy among the young than these flighty, flippant, "cute," know-it-all youth workers who constantly ape liberal digressives and degrade the Lord's church, and ridicule the nobility of the past.

The church has a role regarding parents and youth. It is the same role that it sustains to all people, young and old. It is not to assume the work of the parents and home, providing recreation, secular education, etc. It ought not coddle and condone sins regardless of who is involved. Rather than thinking the answer lies with singles classes, single again classes, youth seminars where brainwashing goes on, week-end retreats that take the young away from Lord's Day congregational worship in favor of "lakeside worship," the church has the God-given task of preaching and teaching the same saving gospel to everyone. To "*preach the word*" by reproving, rebuking, and exhorting is the work of the church. Ignorance of the Word of God and the lack of respect for it is at the heart and base of the loss of young people. It would be better to study the Word rather than engage in "problem solving" where participants share ignorance. The church deserves the full support and cooperation by every home in assisting in such efforts.

**Did You Ever Consider This?**

We must add that parents have a duty to other parents. It is sinful to place stumbling blocks before young people. Parents and their young are responsible for their influence. It is not merely "my own business" what my young people do, where they go, how they dress, what they are allowed to do. Inasmuch as young people influence one another, and peer pressure is heavy, parents have the responsibility to see to it that their young set a good example. It is not unheard that young people who are trying to do right, and parents who are trying to train them right, meet with the most aggravating opposition from other "Christian" parents and young people who are content to follow the world. We have heard it said, "It's nobody's business but ours if my children attend the dance." That is as false as a three dollar bill. Every member of the church, parent, child, elderships, preachers, all are effected adversely. We need to ask if the influence of our home is contributing to the cause of Christ and encouraging Christlike conduct, or is it as often as not like the influence of the sinful world.

Every young person is a gift from God. None can be lost without it being an eternal loss. Experience warns that many do fall away. Let us resolve that we shall make that number as small as possible. Teach the young, show the young, what being a Christian really is. Follow the teaching of the Bible, not the ways of the world. Show them how to resist the influences that are evil when they cannot avoid them. But many of these influences can be avoided-with parental concern, teaching, and guidance.

There is not one young person we can afford to lose. Are you really willing for your son or daughter to go to hell? Certainly, you are not. Just how studious and diligent are your efforts, at home and in the local church, to see to it that they follow Christ?

\* \* \* \* \*

**One of the tragic realities of recent years is how many schools, colleges, and universities operated by brethren are now more a hindrance to faithfulness among the young than helpers of the home to keep them strong and build them up.**

# ***Paul In Rome***

One way that we can learn God's truth is to observe the demonstration of Christianity as practiced by the Lord's apostles. We can see what actions and attitudes God expects of His people. This is the approach of this lesson.

Certainly, Paul was one of God's noblemen. So much is to be learned from his life that we must restrict ourselves in any one study to something specific. We want to observe Paul when he was in Rome as is recorded for us in Acts 28:16-31. Before continuing this reading, we invite you to read the text from your New Testament, then return to our comments.

At this time Paul was in Rome as a prisoner. Although a prisoner, he did have some special privileges because he was living in his "*own hired house*" with privileges of receiving visitors. He was allowed to teach and preach while there with considerable freedom. Just why he enjoyed this unusual circumstance we are not informed, but possibly it was because he was a Roman citizen, and as a Christian he was opposed by many Jews which Romans considered problems anyway.

## **Why Was He in Rome?**

Paul was there as a prisoner because he had been falsely accused by the Jews in Jerusalem as having violated the law of Moses, broken Jewish customs, defiled the temple, desecrating what the Jews considered holy and sacred, and other such crimes. These accusation were based on prejudice and misunderstanding of what Paul was saying and doing, and founded on distortion of his actions. Only by the intervention of Roman authorities was Paul's life spared from a riotous mob in Jerusalem and from others who intended to assassinate him. It seems if the Romans had their way concerning Paul he would have been set free. But because of the insistence of the Jews that he not be released, but tried before them under threatening conditions, Paul made an appeal to go before Caesar. He could to this because he was not only a Jew

but a Roman citizen. This citizenship granted him this privilege.

It was after a series of hearings before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa that he was sent to Rome. He was now in Rome awaiting his trial before Caesar.

Paul called for the Jewish leaders in Rome to visit him. It may seem strange that he would call for representatives of the very people that had caused him to have to be in Rome. The Jews had been his persecutors, not his allies. But Paul knew that the most favorable way of spreading the gospel of Christ was to preach to Jews first. This he had done on his various tours. He and the Jews already had many things in common in addition to being of the same nationality. They both believed in the reality and authority of God. They both served the true God of heaven. They both believed the message of the prophets of the coming Messiah. What Paul wanted to tell the Jews in Rome is how Christ had fulfilled these prophecies and all men must come to God through Him. They shared a strong religious heritage.

The Jews that visited Paul had not heard of the charges that had been made against him, but they had heard about Christians, who they called a sect, and how *"everywhere it had been spoken against."* (Acts 28:22). Paul wanted to tell them of Christ, contending that he had been bound because of his proclamation of *"the hope of Israel."* (Acts 28:20). Since God's promises to Abraham and that *"in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed,"* (Genesis 22:18), Israel had looked for the Messiah, the hope of Israel. He would not only be the hope of Israel, but for the whole world.

### **Paul's Message**

Just what did Paul preach when he preached on the hope of Israel? Acts 28:23 says that *"he expounded and testified the kingdom of God."* Verse thirty-one, *"Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ..."* Paul was preaching Christ and the church just as Peter had done on Pentecost, as Philip had done in Samaria, and gospel preachers have done down through the years. The kingdom of God, which is

the church, and Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, offers not only the hope for Israel, but for the world.

As one listens to much that is being preached in the religious world today it is significant to observe that Paul did not preach the philosophies and speculations of men. He was not preaching the continuation of the law of Moses, social reform with "band-aid" programs of activity, nor did he dwell on the political, military, and economic issues of his day. While those issues existed, and were of relative importance, they did not constitute the burden of the messages of inspired men. Nor should they be the subject of our messages today. Christ, "*the hope of glory*," (Colossians 1:27), was the theme of apostolic preaching, along with the proclamation of all things pertaining to His kingdom.

One reason the world is not more impressed with the glory of Christ in our time is because too many who profess to preach the gospel have diverted their attention away from Christ and His church to other matters, especially the secular and mundane matters. Such reduction of the emphasis on Christ and the church has taken a deadly toll. It is not too uncommon to hear some deride the preaching that centers on Christ and His church. Matters "more relevant" are what some want. But what is more relevant for any generation than the saving truth of the Savior and the saved?

### **He Backed It Up**

As with other preachers of truth, like the other apostles and New Testament evangelists, Paul gave full proof of His message. Paul once wrote, "*Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good.*" (First Thessalonians 5:21). John wrote, "*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*" (First John 4:1). Paul documented his message with an appeal and reference to the inspired prophets of old which the Jews already respected. He turned to the Scriptures. Bible students will remember the nobility of those in Berea who searched the Scriptures to determine what they heard was the truth (Acts 17:11).

Paul told the Galatians that the law was a schoolmaster "*to bring us unto Christ.*" (Galatians 3:24). Hebrews 10:1 pictures the system under Moses as "*a shadow of good things to come.*" The promises and prophecies that God delivered through the prophets of the Old Testament form a foundational basis and evidence to prove that Jesus is the fulfillment of those things that had gone before Him.

On Pentecost Peter cited Joel and David as prophets concerning Christ and the day of Pentecost. Others quoted from Jeremiah, Isaiah, Habakkuk, Zechariah, Daniel, Moses, in fact, all the prophets had foretold of those days concerning Christ and His kingdom (Acts 3:24). Just as Paul had done in Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, and other cities, "*he reasoned with them out of the Scriptures.*" (Acts 17:2).

### **What the World Needs Now**

How the world today needs the message of the Scriptures! First Peter 4:11, "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.*" Second Timothy 4:2, "*Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine.*" Titus 2:1, "*But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.*" He added in verse eight, "*Sound speech, that cannot be condemned.*" Second John 9, "*Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ hath both the Father and the Son.*" Second Timothy 3:16,17, "*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, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*" A "*thus saith the Lord*" may not always be what people want, but it is always what people need, and must hear. It may not be popular, but it is proper.

### **The Reaction**

The reaction to Paul's preaching and teaching in Rome was much as it had been in other places where he had preached the gospel. Acts 28:24, "*And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.*" There

was even confusion and division among those who heard Paul and "*they agreed not among themselves.*" (Acts 28:25). Were these reactions really very different than those we see today when the gospel is preached?

Paul's reaction to their reaction is noteworthy. Having seized the opportunity given to him to preach the truth, and seeing it dismissed by some of them, he once again cited the words of the Old Testament, this time from Isaiah, where he had commented on the hard hearts of the people, and how they closed their ears and eyes to the truth. There were times when Paul remained for extended periods to continue to preach the gospel among those that were receptive. There were times when he had shaken the dust off his feet and moved to another place. Here he could not leave, being a prisoner, but he rebuked those who rejected the truth nonetheless, as Jesus had done recorded in Matthew 13:15.

But the rejection of some did not provoke him to forsake the preaching of the message. He turned to the Gentiles as he had done so many times (Acts 28:28). After all, he had taught that the gospel was needed by all, and was offered to all. He continued to preach the Christ and His kingdom as opportunity was afforded him for two years, receiving all who came to him.

What was the disposition of Paul's trial in Rome is not told us in Scripture. Tradition, and certain indications in Scripture, suggest that he was released, travelled extensively into other areas, only to be arrested the second time, returned to Rome, and executed. Be that as it may be, if the Holy Spirit had wanted to concentrate on those things we would have been given information regarding it, but we have what is adequate.

### **Why He Did As He Did**

Why did Paul do as he did in Rome? Was it not because of his strong desire for others to be saved, such as he had expressed in Romans 10:1? Was it not because he knew the gospel was God's power unto salvation? (Romans 1:16). Was he not trying to fulfill what he considered an obligation? (Romans 1:14).

With patience, determination, knowledge, personal sacrifice, courage, and self-denial, Paul preached the unsearchable riches of Christ and His church. Even though imprisoned, he never slacked his pace. He had "*not shunned to declare... all the counsel of God.*" (Acts 20:27).

The gospel was preached to all the known world in the lifetime of the apostles (Colossians 1:23). It was not done because it was easy, or because they had such modern "miracles" of communication as we have whereby we can cover wide and vast areas with the gospel with a single voice. It was because there were people of the kind and quality of Paul.

The world now needs to hear the message of truth. What the world does with it after hearing it is the world's responsibility. But that the world has opportunity to hear it is the responsibility of you and me as Christians. Preaching the truth to the lost and the saved is still the primary mission of God's people. If we would develop and cultivate the same attitudes and actions as characterized men like Paul, we would soon be able to say of our age what was said in Paul's age, that the gospel "*was preached to every creature which is under heaven.*" (Colossians 1:23).

\* \* \* \* \*

**If things go as planned**, the issue you are presently reading will be mailed sometime near August first, or thereabouts. This simply means that we shall be in the midst of summer months.

Where I live there are a number of congregations, and many are small as far as membership, but they are strong believers in preaching the gospel. Therefore, there are many gospel meetings in progress throughout the summer. In fact, you could almost find a gospel meeting somewhere nearly every evening.

Brethren, we should support gospel meetings. Truth is being taught, the lost being saved, the saved being strengthened, the wayward restored, and God glorified.



# ***Simon's Heart Trouble***

The book of Acts has been called the book of conversions because there are several accounts of men and women being converted to Christ. In Acts two we read of the Jews on Pentecost. Acts eight tells us of the Ethiopian and the Samaritans. Acts nine and twenty-two informs about Saul of Tarsus, later known as the apostle Paul. Acts ten gives us the conversion of the Gentile, Cornelius. Acts sixteen is the record of Lydia and the Philippian jailor. Acts eighteen tells of those in Corinth.

We want to focus attention on one man who was converted when Philip preached to the Samaritans (Acts 8), but who did not remain faithful. In Acts we learn not only the way an alien sinner becomes a child of God, but also what one must do to be restored if he falls away.

The gospel was originally taken to Samaria by Philip, who is called an evangelist in Acts 21:8. It is significant that a Jew took the saving message of God to the Samaritans. The Jews and Samaritans had no association with each other politically, socially, geographically, and religiously. Their animosity toward each other stemmed from many years in the past. When Israel was overrun by Assyria and depopulated by the captors, except for a few, the Assyrians imported others into the land who became the ancestors of the Samaritans. There was some inter-marriage between these imported people and the remaining Israelites to whom a priest was sent to teach the people the law of Moses. Gradually, these people of mixed blood adopted a form of Judaism, having their own temple, their own mountain of worship, sharing with the Jews the expectation of a Messiah to come, who would be the Savior of the world.

## **Rejected by the Jews**

But because of the defilement of the bloodline, the Jews disavowed them. Their troubles began as far back as Judah's return from Babylonian captivity and the rebuilding of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem. By Jesus' day the racial feelings were intense. They considered one another as dogs, refusing to eat with each other, or have association, considering each other as outcasts. Once the Samaritans refused to allow Jesus, a Jew, to remain overnight in their area. So a Jew, Philip, taking the gospel to the Samaritans is noteworthy. He obviously considered the value of their souls regardless of other attitudes. He must have realized that the gospel is for all and that all needed the gospel.

### **The Gospel and the Response**

What did Philip preach in Samaria? Acts 8:5 says he preached Christ. Verse twelve says he preached concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. What Philip preached was Christ and the church.

The people heard this message and gave heed to it (verse six). Philip verified his message by performing miracles (verse seven). He was one of the seven in Acts six on whom the apostles had laid their hands, evidently granting them power to do what they did (Acts 6:6). The people believed what they were taught and were baptized, men and women (verse twelve). We learn from other Scriptures the necessity of confessing Christ to be saved. So we can observe what Philip preached and what the people did. They heard the word, believed it, repented, confessed Christ, and were baptized. This brought great joy to the city (verse eight). There were miracles of healing to document the authority of the words preached. Salvation from sin belonged to them through the long-anticipated Savior.

Among those who heard and obeyed was this man named Simon. He had been a sorcerer who bewitched, tricked, deceived the people with his antics into believing that he was some great one. But when he heard the truth of salvation through Christ, he believed and was baptized (verse thirteen). Sometimes it is surprising who will obey the gospel. Some you think will, will not; and some you think do not care will obey.

We note how some people today say that Simon was not sincere in what he did and was never really saved. Of course, there is no evidence whatever for that contention, but there is great motivation for them to say that because they hold to the false doctrine of "once saved; always saved," and it distresses them to see one who had heard, believed, and obeyed later found in spiritual disaster. Simon disproves their false doctrine. But they love that doctrine. Therefore, they make the charge that Simon was not sincere. They contend that anybody who ever turns away from the truth never really believed the truth anyway. This is the only way they can prop up their doctrine in the face of the overwhelming evidence that one can come to Christ but later disavow the very Lord he once confessed. We wonder if Simon's sincerity would ever have been questioned if the record merely stopped with his baptism and did not tell about his apostasy. Do you not find it of some import that Luke, God's inspired writer, said that Simon believed, just like the others? Have we any substance to doubt his sincerity anymore than the sincerity of those others who did the same thing he did? This only shows the absurd limits some will go to hold to their false doctrines in spite of the Biblical record.

Luke said he was baptized in faith. Jesus had promised, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.*" Do you suppose Jesus was unfaithful to His promise, and just withheld salvation from Simon so this false doctrine could be upheld? When a person does what the Lord commands, are we in a position to say he is insincere until he either admits it, or God reveals it? A person's sincerity, like his understanding, is between that person and God. True, one cannot be taught wrong and obey right. But Simon was taught right and did what he was taught. We have no legitimate alternative but to respect him as a saved man once he had been baptized.

### **Apostles Come Down**

Later, Peter and John, who were apostles, came to Samaria to lay hands on certain brethren granting them miraculous powers, just as they had done for Philip. Philip evidently did not have the power to allow others to perform miracles. This was an exclusive power of the

apostles. When Simon saw what the apostles could do, he wanted that power and offered to buy it (Acts 8:18,19).

Simon made two glaring errors. First, he was not interested in that power for the good he could accomplish for others. This is made evident when Peter told him his heart, the seat of motives, was not right. Second, he thought this power could be bought. There are always people who think money can buy anything. But they, like Simon, have to learn that many things money cannot buy.

### **The Source of His Trouble**

At the root of his trouble was a heart problem. We speak not of the vital blood pump in the physical body, but the mind of man, the center of his thinking, understanding, reasoning, etc. Peter told him, Acts 8:20, 21, 23, *"Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God... For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."*

Let me insert here a reminder that the Good News For Modern Man, sometimes called Today's English Version of the Bible, which is a gross wresting and distortion of God's Word and nothing but an inferior commentary and paraphrase, has Peter saying, in terms of profanity to Simon, "May you and your money go to hell..." Peter never said that. Peter never used such language. The TEV, like the RSV, NIV, LB, etc. are perversions of the Bible, not versions. We have yet to hear from a person, in or out of the church, that could justify the promotion of such volumes that blatantly abuse the Scriptures and teach error!

Simon was on his way to perdition in his spiritual state because his heart had become corrupt. He was not right with God. It is not that he never had been right, but he was not right then. He had been once saved, upon obedience to the terms of salvation. But he had turned away to such an extent that Peter describes him as being *"in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity."* Who could contend that anyone in such a state as that was

still among the saved? Simon is an example of the person that Peter describes in Second Peter 2:20-22.

### **Now What Would He Do?**

Would Simon remain in that apostate condition? Peter told him what he had to do to be forgiven. Acts 8:22, *"Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee."* Repent and pray is the way of restoration. Simon was not told to repent and be baptized again. This he had already done. When he obeyed the gospel he was saved from his past sins, and, like those on Pentecost, was added to the church (Acts 2:47). Now, as a child of God who had strayed, he was told to repent and pray.

John also wrote something pertinent to such a one in First John 1:9, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* Taking all that Scripture instructs the Christian who has fallen, we learn he must repent, confess his sins, and pray to God for forgiveness. This is not the way for one to become a Christian, but the way for a Christian who has fallen to be restored.

Thankfully, we read that Simon's attitude toward his condition was obviously penitent and he requested that his brethren pray for him also (Acts 8:24). He was made right with God once again.

### **Some Have a Similar Problem**

The reason some never become Christians is because they have heart trouble. Their heart is hard and they refuse to hear and heed. But some, who once favorably responded to the Master's call, have turned back into the ways from which they came. One cannot be saved in heaven when he turns back into sin and leaves the fold of the Lord. The reason some remain unfaithful, even though they once started out right, is because they have heart trouble. Until one will give respect to the will of God and do what God says, there is no way to be saved.

\* \* \* \* \*

# ***Falling Need Not Mean Failing***

We recognize the great spiritual power and success of the Bible heroes. Many of these are specifically named in Hebrews eleven and other places. There is a tendency to view these people as being more than men, bigger than life, almost superhuman and different from the rest of us, as if this difference explains their success and power.

They were different, but because they became different. Their difference was acquired and learned. Basically, they were no different from the rest of us as far as being human is concerned. The great qualities for which they are noted can also be possessed by each of us.

Have you noticed how some of the Bible heroes erred during certain periods of their lives? Indeed, they are examples to follow (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 10:11). They are examples to us in three ways. Sometimes they are deserving of being followed. Sometimes they exemplify what should be avoided. There are also records of them that show us how to recover and revive when we have been overcome or fallen.

As we seek to imitate their good, unless we accept them as men and not superhuman gods, unless we consider their blunders and sins as well as their strengths and goodness, we may likely despair in our own times of weakness and stumbling. We might even be tempted to give up and quit trying because we can never be as they were. We run the risk of writing ourselves off as failures and abandon the effort to live the life of a Christian.

## **Falling and Failing**

It is not uncommon for people to sin (Romans 3:23). This is not an attempt to justify our sins, but to merely explain a reality. We sin, then often we ask ourselves, "Where did I fail?" We want to impress upon each reader

as they read this lesson that there is a difference between falling and failing. This is not just a matter of semantics, but a very true and real consideration of spiritual conditions. Failure is not necessarily determined by one fall, or even several falls. Failure is determined by how we react and rebound when we fall. Failure can be the result of falling, but it does not have to be that way.

Success depends upon faithfulness, not perfection. If we must be perfect, sinlessly perfect, to get to heaven none shall ever get there (Romans 3:23; First John 1:8-10; First Corinthians 10:12). When we sin, we can do something about it. We must do something about it. While some might teach that we are “automatically covered by the grace of God” when we sin, this is deceptive and misleading. Some also teach that we are totally passive regarding forgiveness of our sins and we have nothing to do. The Bible does not teach salvation by grace alone. Those who so teach are false teachers.

We want to consider the sins of some great and faithful people of God, not to degrade them, but to note their reaction when confronted with their sins. Surprisingly, some fell in the very areas of their acknowledged strength. But once they sinned, that was not the end of things.

### **Abraham**

Abraham was commendable in so many ways. He is called the “*friend of God.*” (James 2:23). Galatians 3:9 identifies him as “*faithful Abraham.*” The term “father of the faithful” is derived from this passage, alongside Galatians 3:29.

When God called Abraham to leave his home in Ur and go to the place that God designated (Genesis 12:1), verse four says, “*So Abraham departed.*” His faith led him to act as God directed.

Hebrews 11:17, “*By faith, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac...*” This was another manifestation of his great faith. Yet, In Genesis twelve, Abraham lied about his wife Sarah, saying that she was just his sister.

He did this to protect himself, fearing that someone might kill him and take her if they knew she was his wife. This was most certainly a lack of confidence in the providence of God to preserve him and fulfill the promises made unto him. He did this not just once, but twice (Genesis 20).

Even after God had promised him a son by Sarah, he consented to be party to a scheme devised by Sarah whereby he might have a child through Hagar. Inasmuch as Hagar was Sarah's handmaid, it would be considered Sarah's child. But this was not God's plan nor His promise. Once again we see the lack of faith in God and His promises, His power, by this man who is now known as a man of great faith. Surely, he never disbelieved God would give him an heir, but stumbled over how God would do it. These were colossal blunders on his part. None could question he had fallen in these instances.

Once realizing how weak he had been, Abraham could have cried, "I have failed, I am too weak, I am unworthy, there is no hope for me, I am not worth saving, there is no use trying anymore." Sometimes people say and act that way when they sin. But that is not what he did. Someone has suggested that the trail of Abraham could almost be traced by the smoke that ascended from the many altars of sacrifice he made. He "kept on keeping on," following the directions of God. He persisted in being obedient in spite of these setbacks.

### **Noah**

Consider the man Noah. He was doubtless a person of tremendous moral strength and personal conviction. He lived in such a wicked age (Genesis 6:5). But he kept himself clean and withstood the pressures to follow the majority to destruction. He was strong enough to lead his own family safely through the punishment that was wrought against the wicked. He and his were spared in the flood. All of us who are parents would do well if we would be as successful with our children as was Noah in sparing them from drowning. Noah is said to have walked uprightly and was a perfect man, walking with God, a good man and obedient (Genesis 6:9,22).



Yet, after the flood, and after the crisis of his life, we find Noah in a drunken state, unclothed, and involved in something evil, possibly immorality. Other sins are implied in Genesis 9:22. We wonder how a man of his stature could stoop so low.

He could have reacted to this sin by saying, "I have failed, there is no good in me, I am hopeless and beyond repair, I may as well do as the wife of Job once advised, just curse God and die." Some think that when they sin.

But in spite of his folly, he recognized his sin. We conclude this because he is held before us as an example to mankind. His penitent spirit is evidenced in that God allowed him to live another three hundred fifty years beyond the flood. He is called by Peter a "*preacher of righteousness*."

### **David**

David, the most glorious king of Judah, having survived ridicule, injustices, pursuit of enemies, the threat of death from heathens as well as his own countrymen, from Saul to the Philistines, having won every war in which he was involved, is surely described properly as a man of nobility, purity, wisdom, and the highest resolutions and intentions.

In spite of these outstanding qualities, the Bible student is aware of the sin of David with Bathsheba, and the multiplied sins he committed trying to improperly cover his sin.

But David's fall did not result in his total failure. Later, when the great prophet, Nathan, confronted him with the enormity of his crimes, he acknowledged them, confessing, "*I have sinned*." Even though hardship stalked his steps from that day until his death overtook him, he returned to a right relationship with God. Had he not done so, his fall would have certainly meant his failure, even eternal failure.

### **Peter**

What a tremendous man was the apostle Peter. We all admire him. He was the one who confessed, *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."* He also once said, *"To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."* He insisted that his love for Christ was so strong that he would die for the Lord before he would ever deny Him. He is known for his confessions. But he is also known for his denials of Christ. He did the very thing that he was so certain he would never do. He even cursed and swore regarding it. Three times his denials rang out.

That could have been the beginning of the end for Peter. But it was not to be. He realized his evil deeds and went out and wept bitterly. He later rejoined his fellow apostles and spent his life working, preaching, suffering, standing firm for the cause of His Savior. His life is a far greater confession of Christ than the denials he uttered.

From each of these we learn the lesson that to fall need not mean to fail. There are others we could cite, such as John Mark, who quit in the middle of a missionary tour with Paul and Barnabas. Barnabas saw in Mark potential that Paul did not at first see. Later, however, Mark received strongly worded commendations from Paul as being one who was useful and deserving of being accepted by the churches. The Holy Spirit chose him to be one of the writers that told of events during the life of the Son of God on earth.

### **Paul and Others**

Paul was once a blasphemer, a persecutor. But he later became a preacher and an apostle of Christ.

The "prodigal son" wasted his life and substance (Luke 15). But he later came to himself and returned home to his loving father.

The Jews cried out for the crucifixion of Jesus. But many of these same Jews became the first members of the church of Christ on Pentecost.

Simon, the sorcerer, so fell as to be described by Peter as being "*in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.*" Yet, he repented and prayed for forgiveness.

Possibly, we have witnessed runners in a race, who stumbled and momentarily lost ground, only to make the comeback and win the prize. We have seen athletic teams blunder and fumble and make mistakes and look as if they were trying to lose. But they rallied and won the contest.

### **It Could Happen**

Even though one could well be a failure because of a fall, these people did not allow it to happen. Neither should we. They took renewed courage and arose with determination to stay in the good fight and "keep on keeping on." They were crowned with success.

We do read of some who fell and failed because they did not recover. We think of Cain, Saul, the first king of Israel, Judas, Demas, and others who left their first love.

James 5:19,20, "*Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.*" James 5:16a, "*Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another...*" Galatians 6:1, "*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*" First John 1:9, "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*" Acts 8:22, "*Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.*" Revelations 2:5a, "*Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works...*"

### **Our Primary Thought**

These passage teach that, even though one falls, he need not fail. He can be restored. He can come back to the Lord. He can start anew. What a glorious thought that God has so loved us that He has not only provided the

way for us to come to Christ and be saved from past sins and enter fellowship with Him, but should we make the tragic mistake of ever turning from Him, He has provided the way for us to come back to Him. Can we ever question the extent of the love of God?

One truly fails when he never comes to Christ, the only One who can save. He truly fails when, after coming to Christ but returning to the ways of sins, is not restored again to Christ. One succeeds when he comes to Christ and then lives faithfully, dying "*in the Lord*."

We would encourage every reader to take heart. Regardless of what has been in the past, you can go to heave. "*Though your sins be as scarlet, they can be as white as snow.*"

\* \* \* \* \*

**The book of Psalms** is unique in many ways. It not only contains the shortest chapter in the Bible, Psalm 134 containing only three verses and fewer words than any other, but also the longest chapter, Psalm 119, with 176 verses. Also, it contains more chapters than any other book.

People who love the Lord have often turned to the inspired writings in Psalms, finding the guidance, comfort, encouragement, strength, for themselves as they see unfolded before them the matchless wisdom, power, glory, and grandeur of God.

May we suggest that you make greater use of this marvelous portion of inspired Scripture as you study. You can be sure you will never exhaust the beauty, information, wisdom, and confirmation of truth that you will find there. It will always lift your soul and give you greater determination to continue faithful in the service of the true and living God the book glorifies. JB

\* \* \* \* \*



## **Helping the Home in Crisis**

We are facing a crisis with respect to the homes in our land. Divorce is running rampant and the merciless toll upon men, women, children, the church, and the nation is devastating. How can the church help in this situation?

We must be compassionate toward those who have problems. But we must teach them God's will regarding the home, marriage, divorce, remarriage. The false doctrines some are teaching do not help, but hinder. We must not be guilty of trying to accommodate the sins of the world, but teach people the forgiveness of sins comes through repentance and correction of the evil ways of life.

Because so many marriages have been broken without scriptural grounds, and because so many have remarried without God's permission, some seem to think the solution is to teach a different gospel regarding the subject. The truth, and only the truth, makes us free (John 8:32), not the ways of the world.



**JAMES W. BOYD**

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

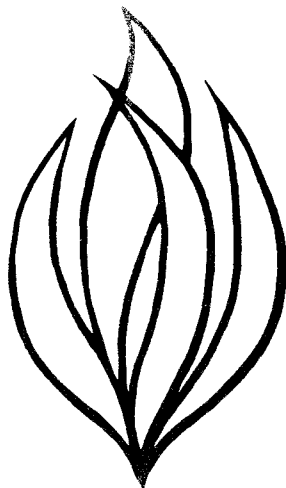
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# A Burning Fire



*"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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# **Know Your Bible**

## **NUMBER ONE**

The Bible, the Book of books, the Scriptures, is the Word of God. Second Timothy 3:16,17 teaches it is inspired of God, therefore infallible, inerrant, authoritative, and all-sufficient, written by over forty men as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. They lived and wrote in a variety of places, using different languages, of different occupations, possessed different levels of learning, over a period of some fifteen hundred years.

One indisputable evidence of the divine guidance of the Bible is its unity. Composed of sixty-six books, thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament, yet one book, with one theme (God's plan for redeeming man), one purpose (the salvation of man from sin), and one central Person (Jesus Christ). Without contradictions within, it is perfectly fitted together, the result of miraculous oversight by Deity in composition.

### **Man's Greatest Need**

Man needs salvation from sin and knowledge how to live. This he can have by coming to Christ through faith, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism into Christ. But he first must know what to believe (Romans 10:13ff). This calls for study (Second Timothy 2:15), a duty too often neglected or given secondary importance.

Knowledge of the Bible is essential to know how to live. It is not in man to direct his own steps (Jeremiah 10:23). Scripture provides information as to purpose, meaning, and significance of life. It answers the question, "*If a man die, shall he live again?*" Without this knowledge he cannot make proper decisions in life, discerning good from evil (Hebrews 5:14). To what other source can man turn with confidence to solve problems we face? "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Father.*" (Matthew 4:4). This Word is a "*lamp unto our feet and a light unto our pathway.*" (Psalm 119:105). Without the Bible we cannot know what is of true and everlasting value, or how to set priorities in life. From the Bible we learn how to rear

our children, live alongside others, be useful in life. More important, we learn how to have eternal life in heaven with God and the redeemed (John 5:39).

In this lesson we shall show this unity of the Bible as one story from start to finish. We shall get a panoramic view of its message, presenting the relationship of one part to other parts, focusing attention on Bible study, Bible knowledge, Bible application in life. We want to be motivated to learn and tell the old, old story.

### **We Begin With Genesis**

Genesis informs us of the origin of all things, including the world, mankind, everything God created by the power of His Word. The first man and woman were Adam and Eve. From them have come all people. We read of them in the Garden of Eden, a Paradise, before the intrusion of sin that resulted from submission to Satanic temptation. They were driven from the garden.

Their first two sons, Cain and Abel, were examples of worshippers. Abel offered his sacrifice by faith, doing as God said. Cain went his own way. Jealousy by Cain provoked him to commit the first murder, killing Abel.

The descendants of the first pair were both good and evil. We read of patriarchs like Enoch, who walked with God, and Methuselah, who lived nine hundred sixty nine years. But as generations followed, the world grew worse and worse, more and more sinful, until God repented He had made man and determined to cleanse the world of wickedness. Hence, the flood came in the time of Noah, and the preservation of the race by the ark.

After the flood, the earth was repopulated, and men once again turned from God, building for themselves a tower to serve as a monument to themselves and prevent their dispersion. It was left unfinished, however, when God confused their tongues. It is called the Tower of Babel.

### **Enter Abraham and Family**

God called Abraham to leave the Ur of Chaldees and go as God directed him. This is a milestone in revelation.

God gave Abraham great promises, such as he would be the father of a great nation, his descendants numberless like the sands of the seas and stars of heaven. God would bless those that blessed him, and curse those that cursed him. His people would have a land of their own. The greatest promise was that through his seed, all nations would be blessed. This referred to Christ (Galatians 3:16). At the time the promises were given, Abraham was old and without children. Nonetheless, each promise came to pass, and the story of the Bible from that time forward is the record of God keeping His promises made.

Abraham went to Canaan with Sarah, his wife, and Lot, his nephew. We read of his prosperity, sojourns into Egypt, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the rescue of Lot, the episode with Hagar and Ishmael, and eventually the birth of the promised son, Isaac.

Following Isaac there came Jacob, the father of twelve sons, who became the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. A most interesting record is given regarding one son, Joseph, being sold into slavery, his life in Egypt at Potiphar's house, in prison, and finally before Pharaoh to whom he interpreted dreams that foretold of coming years of plenty to be followed by famine. Joseph was elevated to second in rank throughout all Egypt.

During the famine, Jacob's other sons came to Egypt to buy grain. They had to make their purchase from Joseph, whom they thought was dead. In time, Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers, and all of Jacob's family moved into Egypt, into the land of Goshen. There they grew into a nation, only to later be enslaved when a different Pharaoh became fearful of them.

### **Moses On the Scene**

When Israel was suffering in bondage, and every effort was made to exterminate them, Moses was born. Moses was reared in the palace of Pharaoh as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, and lived there his first forty years. At his effort to deliver an Israelite from an Egyptian taskmaster by killing him, Moses was forced to flee Egypt, and spent his second forty years tending the flocks of Jethro, who had become his father-in-law.

The third forty year period of Moses' life began with God calling him from the burning bush to lead Israel into deliverance and to the land of Canaan, the land of promise. The reluctant Moses accepted the task, returned to Egypt, demanded Pharaoh to free Israel. But it was not until the accomplishment of the ten plagues that Israel was allowed to leave. Israel was spared destruction from Pharaoh's effort to recapture Israel by passing through the Red Sea on dry land.

Moses led Israel to Mt. Sinai where God gave Israel the law that was to govern that nation until the coming of the "seed" of Abraham, Jesus Christ. For forty years Moses led Israel, listening to the constant complaints and murmurings of the Jews until they reached the eastern banks of the Jordan River. There Moses relinquished the leadership to Joshua, and died in Mt. Nebo, or Mt. Pisgah. Through the forty years of wanderings by Israel in the wilderness God provided them water and manna to eat, guiding them by day with the cloud and the pillar of fire by night.

### **The Rest of the Pentateuch**

Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy reveal the contents of the law that God gave Israel through Moses that governed every facet of life. The Law of Moses was for Israel alone, never a universal law from God for all people. Just precisely what was the relationship of God and the rest of the people of the world during this Mosaic Age is not altogether revealed. The story of the Bible is the story of God's plan for saving man, and the Savior who was to come through Israel. This explains the inclusion of God's dealings with Israel as well as the limited information regarding God's relationship with other peoples. Israel was the chosen nation, the descendants of Abraham, the people through whom the Christ was to come into the world.

### **History Books**

In the book of Joshua we begin reading the history of Israel in taking the land of Canaan, the cities of Jericho, Ai, city after city, and area after area. The land was then divided among the tribes. Great stories and lessons from

these accounts are found concerning such people as Joshua, Rahab, Achan, and many, many others.

After the conquering of the land, and after the death of Joshua, God ruled Israel with the loosely organized system of judges for some three to four hundred years. It was an age of cycles that began with prosperity, digression into sin, suffering at the hands of enemies, repentance, God raising a deliverer (a judge), deliverance from enemies, and a return to serving God and prosperity. Over and over this cycle was repeated in Israel. The account of fifteen judges are recorded in the books of Judges and First Samuel. We read of people like Deborah, Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, and the last judge, Samuel. The book of Ruth relates events that occurred during the period of the judges.

### **Kings of Israel and Judah**

First Samuel relates the work of the last judge and the first king of Israel. Weary of God's ways, and desiring to be like nations around them, Israel requested and God allowed them to have a king. Saul reigned for forty years, followed by David for another forty years, then Solomon for the third forty years when Israel was a United Kingdom. It was a time of growth, power, wealth, prestige, taking of territory, and the victories over enemies. This was due largely to the reign of David. After Solomon the nation suffered a division into two nations, the ten tribes of the north calling themselves Israel, and the two tribes of the south known as the nation of Judah. The descendants of David continued to reign over Judah.

For about two and one half centuries these two nations existed side by side, sometimes as enemies, sometimes as allies, sometimes indifferent to each other. Not one of the nineteen kings of Northern Israel are commended as being righteous. Only few, around six, of the kings of Judah receive special commendation. Northern Israel was invaded and conquered by Assyria and taken into captivity from which they never returned as a nation. About one hundred thirty-five years later, Babylon overthrew Judah, taking them into captivity, from which they returned seventy years later.

## **After Captivity Until John**

The return was accomplished in three stages. Under Zerubbabal the temple was rebuilt. Under Ezra there was a great religious revival. Under Nehemiah the walls of Jerusalem were erected. The book of Esther tells of the providential care and preservation of Israel when in captivity and under threat from Persian plots to destroy the Jews.

During the history of Judah and Northern Israel, and the time of Judah's return from captivity, we read of the work of the prophets who preached, warned, prophesied, condemned the sins of the people, called for repentance that did not come until destruction overtook them. Many of the prophecies foretold the coming kingdom of God, the establishment of this spiritual kingdom, the church, the Messiah, and the assured fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham.

The Old Testament closes with a prophecy in Malachi of one who would come and do a great work, the very work that was done some four hundred years later by John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, the Christ.

Even though there is no writing from God for the four hundred years between Malachi and Matthew, God, through such prophets as Daniel, predicted events that would pertain to Israel during those centuries. As these events transpired, the time of the coming of the Messiah was drawing nigh. The New Testament continues unfolding of God's plan for the redemption of man.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **NUMBER TWO**

### **Between the Testaments**

The Old Testament closed with the Jews having returned from captivity in Babylon. By the time of the New Testament a great part of the Jews had scattered throughout the world. This dispersion began under the Persian Empire that followed Babylonian rule. The Jews

fared rather well under the Persians with some exceptions. They were also respected by Alexander the Great, the Grecian conqueror. He recognized their intelligence, industriousness, integrity, and stability. He used them for his own favor. When Alexander died his empire was divided into four parts among four of his generals. Palestine was given to the Ptolemy family who ruled Egypt. While he and his sons generally favored the Jews, there was constant struggle between Egypt and Syria for the land of Palestine. The Jews were subjected to constant persecution and warfare between them.

During these stages of historical importance, the Old Testament was translated into the Greek language, called the Septuagint Version. That version was often quoted by New Testament inspired writers. This translation and the dispersion of the Jews had a tremendous impact upon the spread, knowledge, and vigor of Judaism and the expectancy of the Messiah.

When the Syrians conquered Palestine and taking it from Egypt, the Jews were severely persecuted. Their worship was terminated, the temple desecrated, everything possible was done to humiliate the Jews and destroy them and their religion. But both survived.

Actually the extreme cruelty administered by the Syrians against the Jews "backfired" because it strengthened the resolve of the Jews to drive the Syrians from their homeland. This they did under the leadership of the Maccabees. After a successful revolt against the Syrians, for approximately a century the Jews enjoyed relative independence. But internal struggles for power finally brought the Romans into the area about 63 B.C. After several appointed rulers, Herod the Great was given power in Jerusalem and he ruled when Jesus was born.

### **Into the New Testament**

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the records of what we know of the life and activities of Jesus Christ. Six months before His birth, John the Baptist was born. Jesus was born as prophesied to the virgin named Mary who was espoused to Joseph. Because of threats against His life He was taken to Egypt where He remained until

Joseph was instructed to return to the land of Canaan and make his residence in Nazareth. There He remained until about the age of thirty years.

Before continuing with the account of the life of Christ it is well that we know that only about three and one half years of the life of Christ were involved in His ministry, and probably less than thirty days of those three and one half years are specifically recorded. Very little is known of the life of Jesus from the time He returned from Egypt into Nazareth until He was thirty years old. We do have the record of His visit to the temple at the age of twelve and the assertion that He was subject to Joseph and Mary during those years.

These four books, rather than being a complete biography of the life of Christ, serve a different purpose. John 20:30,31, *"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 the living God and believing have life in his name."*

The outstanding events in these four books include His baptism, the temptation by the devil, His preaching the sermon from an unnamed mount, the selection of His apostles, the way He fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies, His travels, teaching, preaching, performing miracles to confirm His word, and establishing His identity as the Son of God. For approximately three and one half years He was active in Galilee, Samaria, Judea, and only once or twice venturing outside these provinces.

These books also reveal how envy, jealousy, and hatred mounted against Him. He was betrayed, seized, subjected to a series of mock trials before both religious and civil authorities, and even though declared innocent of the crimes of which He was accused, He was subjected to all manner of indignities and humiliations, and finally crucified as if He were a criminal. He was buried in a borrowed tomb, and there remained for the prophesied three days and nights. When He died He fulfilled the function of the Law of Moses, taking it out of the way.



and it was abolished by being fulfilled. It is no longer God's law for any man, including the Jews.

But He arose from the dead by the power of God and thereby declared to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4). He was seen by many witnesses after His resurrection, at least twelve appearances being recorded, once being seen by as many as five hundred at once.

Having given promise to His apostles of the coming of the Holy Spirit, and having given them the commission to go and preach the gospel to the whole world, Jesus ascended into heaven to receive His kingdom, assuming His place of authority by the right hand of God on His heavenly throne . King of kings and Lord of lords.

### **The History of the Early Church**

The second chapter of Acts details the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles as Jesus promised, and the establishment of the Lord's kingdom which is the church. On the first Pentecost after His ascension, the promises and prophecies of God were accomplished. The kingdom came and salvation was offered to sinful man on the merit of the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. For the first time repentance and remission of sins was preached in His name. Those who heard the message of salvation as preached that day, believed and obeyed it by repenting and being baptized, and added to His church.

From then until now the church has existed, the kingdom is a reality, and salvation for man is given when man meets the conditions that God announced through the apostles.

In Acts we have several records of people being converted to Christ, what they were taught, what they did, and the result of their obedience. Acts gives us a portion of the history of the early church, its growth, governmental nature, and the spread of New Testament Christianity throughout the known world. The lives and works of the apostles, particularly of Peter and Paul, are revealed.

### **The Story Continues in the Epistles**

Following Acts the Bible furnishes us twenty-one epistles or letters that the Holy Spirit had inspired writers to write to Christians. Some were addressed to individuals, some to a specific local congregation, others to Christians generally. From the epistle of Romans through the epistle of Jude, we learn of the manner of life the Christian is to live, what are to be his goals, ideals, priorities, and mission in life. We learn how to worship, the necessity of preparation for the Lord's return, the coming resurrection, judgment, and eternity. These epistles repeatedly urged the Christian to be faithful and remain loyal to the Savior and His way. Without the guidance from these epistles we would be at a loss for much of the nature of Christianity.

### **The Story Closes**

The great and loving story of God's plan for saving man through Jesus Christ concludes with the book of Revelation. That book is not, as many mistakenly seem to think, a copy of tomorrow's newspaper, foretelling everything that shall happen between then and the end of the world. Rather, it is a book of optimism, hope, expectancy, victory for the faithful, and eventual triumph of good over evil. It is a book where the glories of heaven are unfolded in figurative language, making us realize its reality and the grandeur of it, exceeding even our fondest dreams. Even though persecution may beset our path, there is no despair, no defeat, but joy, peace, love, goodness, and eternal bliss with God and the redeemed awaiting the faithful Christian, God's child.

The book of Revelation was primarily dealing with events and conditions then faced by the early church, and the highly symbolic and figurative language of it sends forth the message of assurance to one and all who remain faithful and loyal to Christ.

The Bible is the old, old story of Jesus and His love. This is the Book of books that we must study, know, believe, and obey. Herein is revealed man's hope for this life and the life to come, Jesus Christ, the hope of glory.

\* \* \* \* \*

# **Unknown Tongues**

## **NUMBER ONE**

An attempt to preach and practice New Testament Christianity requires an understanding of the Biblical revelation of our subject. It was a New Testament phenomenon that was not characteristic of previous dispensations. Isaiah spoke prophetically of them (Isaiah 28:11), and Paul referred to that prophecy in his discussion of tongues in First Corinthians 14:21. Tongue speaking was one of the nine spiritual or miraculous gifts or powers characteristic of the early church as listed in First Corinthians 12. Many, even though they teach different and contradictory doctrines, claim that they are possessors of "tongue speaking" power miraculously today. One wonders if the Holy Spirit is placing His endorsement on their confusion.

There are five groups of verses dealing with this subject. Two lessons are intended to give a brief investigation of each group and Paul's inspired regulations of tongues.

### **Mark Sixteen**

Mark 16:15-20. For the sake of space, we urge the reader to consult his Bible at this point and read these verses in order to know what revelation is under consideration.

It says, "These signs shall follow them that believe." The signs are the powers the apostles would receive. The "them" refers to the apostles of verse fourteen, and those that believed their message and were granted these powers. Not all had these abilities. But wherever the gospel is preached even yet, the report of these miracles are preached.

It is important to note that the passage does not say that these signs would continue to be worked and reworked. In fact, the duration of these powers is not discussed in this passage at all. That is found elsewhere.

Among the signs mentioned is "*new tongues*." They were not new in the sense that they had never been spoken

before by anyone. They were new to those who would be speaking them by this power. The tongues were for a sign (First Corinthians 14:22). They were used to confirm, verify, prove, authenticate the message preached (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3,4). The message has now been verified and confirmed and even committed to Scripture.

It is interesting to note that those who claim to have miraculous power to "speak in tongues" today even as recorded here do not perform the other miraculous deeds mentioned. This leaves them very suspect that they have any such "tongue speaking" power either.

### **Acts Two**

Acts 2:4-11 Please read. This is a record of events on Pentecost in Jerusalem. The apostles spoke in tongues as the result of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them as Christ had promised (John 14:26; 16:13; Acts 1:8). People from many nations who spoke different languages were present that day, and yet, they heard these Galileans speaking languages not native to Galileans. The tongues spoken were languages (Acts 2:4,6,8,11). The languages spoken were new to the apostles, but were not new to the hearers. They did not speak unintelligible babble, but languages that the hearers could understand. It was a miracle of speaking.

We are not to understand that an apostle rose to speak and spoke some weird noise and everybody understood the one noise in his own speech. Rather, the apostles could speak the many languages so the hearers could be informed. They spoke languages that were not normal, native, nor natural to them, languages they had not learned, but now could miraculously speak. They did not speak gibberish induced from emotional reactions. This was not some "heavenly language" or ecstatic blabber.

### **Acts Ten**

Acts 10:46. At the house of Cornelius in Caesarea, this Gentile and those of his house spoke in tongues. Peter had seen a vision in Joppa instructing him to go there, and six Jewish brethren went with him. Cornelius told

Peter why they wanted him (verse 33), and Peter responded that the gospel is for all.

As Peter began to speak, the Holy Spirit came upon these Gentiles and they began to speak in tongues (Acts 10:44,46). This reminded Peter of the event on Pentecost in the direct manner, not measure, of the coming of the Holy Spirit at that time (Acts 11:15-17).

Paul wrote that tongues were for a sign to the unbeliever (First Corinthians 14:22). On Pentecost they were a sign to those who did not believe in Christ. Here they were a sign to the six brethren who came with Peter that the gospel was for the Gentiles as well as the Jews. The report of it was later a sign to other brethren as well (Acts 11:17,18: 15:7-9). This is the way that those to whom Peter later explained the events understood the purpose of the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:18). These things were not the way to save Gentiles, nor show they were already saved. The gospel had not even been preached to them yet. It was a miraculous event showing the universality of the gospel, and as evidence to the Jewish brethren in Christ who were with Peter that what was taking place had God's approval and direction.

### **Acts Nineteen**

Acts 19:1-7. You must read it. Paul was passing through Ephesus and found some there who had been baptized of John's baptism, but who knew nothing of the Holy Spirit. One who has been baptized by the authority of Christ has heard of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; Matthew 28:19). Obviously, these had not been baptized correctly; that is, for the right reason and by the right authority. Paul took them and baptized them again, this time the same way Peter taught people to be baptized on Pentecost. John had baptized looking forward to the coming Lord. But the Lord had already come, lived, died, been buried, and raised. John's forward looking baptism was no longer valid. We can learn here that when one has been immersed, but with the incorrect understanding and for the incorrect reason, the proper thing to do is to baptize them again, and correctly.

After their baptism, Paul laid his hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit, being granted miraculous powers, the ability to speak in tongues, and they did.

We must inject here the way the Bible teaches people received these miraculous powers. In Acts two and ten they were given directly by the Holy Spirit. Here, and other places, they were given by the laying on of apostolic hands. In Acts eight, Philip, who performed miracles, (verse six), evidently did not have power to enable others to perform miracles. But when the apostles, Peter and John, came to Samaria, they laid their hands on some and they received such power (Acts 8:14-17). Simon, who wanted to buy that power was sternly rebuked and was told this was not any of his business (Acts 8:20,21). This was an apostolic prerogative entirely.

One of the reasons Paul wished to visit the brethren in Rome was to impart to them a spiritual gift (Romans 1:11). His presence was required in order to do that. One reason we know the miraculous age has ceased is because the apostles, who performed miracles, are dead, and those on whom they laid hands are dead. The power to impart such gifts belonged only to the apostles.

### **First Corinthians**

First Corinthians 12, 13, and 14 contain a discussion of miraculous or spiritual gifts found in the early church. Chapter twelve lists nine gifts, among them the power to speak in tongues. Chapter thirteen, often called the "love" chapter, does discuss love, but in context shows the superiority of faith, hope, and love over the use of miracles. The miracles would vanish away, fail, and cease. There was a "*more excellent way*," (First Corinthians 12:31), and that is the way of love.

Chapter fourteen reveals limitations, restrictions, and regulations regarding the use of the gift of speaking in tongues which we shall discuss in the second lesson.

The tongues are called "*unknown tongues*." The word "*unknown*" does not appear in the Greek text, and is in italics in the reliable King James Version to denote that

it is an added or explanatory word. The tongues were not unknown in the sense that nobody could understand them. They were languages that various people spoke customarily. They were unknown to the speakers. The languages were not normal, native, and natural to them, not having been learned as people can learn other languages, but were given to them miraculously for the purpose already discussed. They were known miraculously. Again, they were not unintelligible babble, gibberish, and emotional raving.

Before going further, let us gather up in summary what we have learned. Tongues were peculiar to the early church, not to previous ages. They were prophesied to occur. The ability to speak them was due to the supernatural, or miraculous. They were understandable and intelligent, not senseless blabbering in a hyper-emotional state. They were tools to convey and confirm the message of truth that was preached. They were used to take the gospel to every nation. They were possessed by certain ones either by direct operation of the Holy Spirit, or by the laying on of apostles' hands. We have learned in what sense they were "*unknown*." We learned they were a sign to unbelievers, and a temporary measure, never intended to be permanent. We shall discuss this matter further. The use of them was governed and regulated by divine direction, which we will consider in the following lesson.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **NUMBER TWO**

There are a number of regulations in Scripture concerning the use of tongues. Obviously, this power was used when needed and not for an emotional outburst, or as a show to be seen of men. There was no need for them when everyone present understood the same language.

Not every Christian had this ability (First Corinthians 12:8,30). Nor was it to be used unless there was an interpreter (First Corinthians 14:11-13). The power to interpret was also a spiritual gift (First Corinthians 12:10). First Corinthians 14:18 indicates that some could speak in more languages than others. The use of tongues

and the interpretation of them was to avoid confusion and reproach in their use (First Corinthians 14:23).

Most of the regulations of tongues are found in the fourteenth chapter. Tongues were for a sign (verse 22), to edify and clarify. To merely speak in tongues just to speak in tongues would accomplish no good purpose. The speaker might understand, but hearers would not. How different this is today among some who claim this power! They will burst forth in some gibberish that neither they nor anyone else comprehends.

### **Regulations**

Those who spoke in tongues were not to speak at the same time, but "*by course*," that is, in an orderly manner, one after the other (verse 27). Obviously the speaker had control over using tongues. Some today claim they cannot hold back when the Spirit moves them and they join with many others and all start their babbling at the same time. What confusion!

Notice also that women were forbidden to use this gift (verses 34,35). Even in this type of assembly where tongues were used, which is unlike any assembly today because tongues are no longer used, women were expected to respect the teaching of First Timothy 2:12. The women were not prohibited from all teaching. In fact, older women are taught to teach younger women, their children, and even have assisted in teaching men under certain conditions (Proverbs 1:8; Titus 2:5; Acts 18:36). Philip had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:9). The prohibition of women teaching is where she assumes rank, authority, position, or status over the man. There is no record of Christian women violating this rule. We read of no women preachers or women teaching in mixed assemblies. Those who wish to ignore this Biblical prohibition need to produce Biblical authority for what they do. This was not merely a cultural matter.

Does it not strike you as strange how the modern so-called tongue speakers are more often than not the women? They get involved in their exercises more than the men. What kind of respect for the Bible is this?



Contrary to the present and popular concept of tongue speaking, this gift was not the greatest gift even when the gift was used (verses 5, 19). Teaching so as to produce understanding was considered far better (verse 19).

There are people of many religious groups who still claim this miraculous power. Ironically, they all accuse the others of being frauds. But we are inclined to agree with all of them and consider them all as frauds. They do not do the same thing, nor for the same purpose, nor by the same power as was done in the early church. This miraculous gift, like all others, has ceased.

### **Cessation**

As already noted, the apostles who had the power are dead. Those on whom they laid hands are dead. The gifts were specified to cease when that which is perfect is come (First Corinthians 13:8-10).

Notice, this does not refer to the coming of Christ. It does not say, "When that WHO is perfect," but, "*that which is perfect.*" It refers to some thing, not someone. It refers to the perfect will of God fully revealed. It refers to the "*faith once delivered.*" (Jude 3), the "*perfect law of liberty*" (James 1:25). For a time God's truth was embodied in inspired men, earthen vessels (Second Corinthians 4:7). But now His all-sufficient will is embodied in the completed and confirmed Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Not only are the people gone that used these tongues, and the power so used now, but the purpose for the use of tongues has already been accomplished: namely, the confirmation of the Word (Hebrews 2:3,4; Mark 16:20).

A similar teaching is found in Ephesians 4:11-13. Paul was speaking of those who labored with miraculous power (verse 8), not people of today or people down through the ages. He said these gifts would exist "*till we all come in the unity of the faith.*" This does not mean, as some modern perversions of Scripture have mistranslated, until we all believe alike. That day will never exist. It refers to "*the faith*" completely revealed in its oneness, completeness, and fulness. Until that was

accomplished these gifts would remain. After that, they would cease.

Notice in First Corinthians 13 that the cessation of these gifts would occur while faith, hope, and love continued to abide. When the Lord Jesus returns faith will become sight, and hope will become actual and fulfilled. You do not hope for what you already have (Romans 8:24). Yet, these miraculous powers would cease while these three characteristics continued. Love will continue even after Jesus returns. Therefore, I know that the failing to these gifts was not to wait until Christ returns, but before He returns. It was to terminate when the full revelation, given in portions, was fully given.

### **Their Purpose**

As has been illustrated properly many times, tongues and other miraculous powers were like a scaffold used to build a building. While the building was being erected, the scaffold served an essential purpose. But once the building was completed, the scaffold is removed. While the revelation of God was being revealed, part by part, these gifts were useful and God considered them necessary. But once the revelation was fully given, there remained no more purpose for them. This fact in itself shows the folly for the contention of continuous revelation, latter day revelation since the time of the apostles that some claim for themselves today. When you hear someone claim to have received some extra-Biblical message from God, and someone else makes the same claim, then another and another, and they do not even agree but often contradict, you can be sure that the Holy Spirit is not providing that confusion. It results from the unwillingness of men to be content with what God has revealed, wanting more and more and more.

It is also noteworthy that those who claim to speak in tongues today still have to study and learn languages that are not their native and normal languages just like the rest of us. If they possessed the gift of tongues, they could speak without that study. But they do not, cannot, and will not. What they do is to engage themselves under some hyper-emotionalism and taught procedures of babbling vowel sounds without sense or meaning and

have the audacity to call it miraculous tongue speaking like the days of the early church. It is false to the core!

### **The Holy Spirit Operates**

There is no question but the Holy Spirit operates on the hearts of men today. Every person converted to Christ is converted as a result of the operation of the Holy Spirit. But that operation is not a miraculous and/or direct operation. The Holy Spirit operates through the use of the inspired Word of God, that was given by the Spirit, that furnishes us completely in everything we need and must have in service to God.

If and when people will be willing to accept God's Word, they will cease their contention and expectation of the miraculous manifestations that they falsely claim to possess. The so-called tongue speaking claimed today is supposed to designate that a person is being "spiritual," and somewhat superior to others. What it really demonstrates is a lack of faith in God's Word and the desire that God do something special for them that He never promised to do for them. It is like the request of the rich man in Luke 16 who wanted something special for his brothers. something more than what God had already provided.

When someone asks you, "Do you believe in tongue speaking?" you must be careful of your answer. "NO," we deny that anyone today speaks in tongues as did the early Christians recorded in the Bible. "YES," we believe that the early Christians did speak in languages unknown to them through natural means and through normal learning, just as the inspired record reveals.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Mark Twain once said**, "I'm opposed to millionaires, but it would be dangerous to offer me the position." As Scripture teaches, "*But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.*" (First Timothy 6:8).

# ***Our Kind of World***

It is presumptuous to assume one can speak with unfailing certainty on this encompassing subject. The scope of it should not cause us to look away, however. We need to know the direction the world is going and what we can do about it.

We live in a small portion of a very large world. Several billion people inhabit our globe, with numerical increase daily. It boggles the mind to list the problems facing mankind about population, let alone prescribe all solutions. We confine our thoughts to the world near us, realizing that today events on one side of the earth may affect lives everywhere. But we start at home with matters confronting us daily and directly.

Christian people are concerned about the world even as was God. Our concern is not simply physical, social, financial, environmental, etc. Rather, our emphasis is spiritual, contending as do the Scriptures, that mankind is in sin and needs to change. He may alter temporarily his environment and solve some problems, but he must eventually deal with the reality of sin. The thrust of the doctrine of Christ is, *"Repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out."* (Acts 3:19). Once this becomes primary, then spiritual growth and development will lead to improvement in all other things.

## **The Spiritual Disease**

Many have said society is sick, but do not realize the disease is self-imposed and is sin. People cannot deny personal responsibility for their evil and then blame "society." God holds each one accountable for what he does in this body (Second Corinthians 5:10).

Many philosophies, theologies, ideologies are contributing to the problems of man rather than contributing to their solutions. Doctrines are being propagated that will uproot and destroy everything we hold sacred, even human life. Humanism, atheism, communism, evolution, "do-you-own-thing" doctrines

are all designed to create more havoc rather than man's good. Our world is diseased with these things and deny all that Christ said, did, and taught.

### **Liberals Are Enemies of Truth**

Many people who claim to be religious, who even say they believe in God and the Bible, continue to affiliate themselves with liberal churches that undermine the truth across the whole spectrum. Liberal denominations are dominated by modernism and skepticism, playing the same tunes as the forces of evil that would enslave mankind. The irrational, inconsistent, and anti-Christ positions of liberal churches and their clergymen are apparent all around. Probably truth has few enemies more sinister than liberal religions. They cloak themselves in piety, but work for the cause of the devil in morality, doctrine, and even politics and international movements that intend to bury everything that is true concerning God and His Word. Polls reveal the disbelief of the Bible by the vast majority of clergymen. The mainline denominations are polluted with seminary trained agnostics and atheists. To them the authority of the Scripture has been replaced by the subjective sophistication of the self-appointed scholar. They do not teach faith, but doubt. Their hearers will never learn God's truth from them.

Some deny whatever they dislike about the Bible. They deny man's spirit, heaven, hell, judgment, miracles, sin, forgiveness, eternity, absolute truth, even that there is a right and wrong. What can the world expect after being indoctrinated by these Satanic servants of evil and darkness except God's wrath and punishment? This is our kind of world.

### **Sowing and Reaping**

We need only mention the horrendous crime of our land to know that society in our kind of world is reaping more and more the sowing of false ideas in the minds of the populace. If we are all animals, as the educational systems and liberal churches teach, why have respect for your fellowman more than an animal? If this life is all there is, why not do-you-own-thing, regardless of how it

affects others? If there is no truth, who is to condemn anything anyone does? Why not lie, steal, commit adultery, cheat, murder, or anything else? Such doctrines in our kind of world provide no safeguard for anyone from anything. Our kind of world finds more and more adopting such self-destructive patterns of thought and behavior.

Our kind of world has turned out marriage, the home, sexual relationships, and morality as God teaches. They bring nothing good to replace it. The pace of down-with-God and up-with-nothing has quickened in our world.

Racism is prevalent throughout the world. Some social manipulators would mix everything as if that would solve everything. It solves nothing but generally destroys personal pride and creates more hatred. The sociological experimentalists are willing to use their fellowmen as guinea pigs to experiment with their philosophies. Conflicts are raised to fever pitch. Social and civil upheaval runs rampant. When we learn that we are not all alike, then we can have peace. When we learn that all can be spiritual brethren in Christ, we can have peace. But in our kind of world the will of Jesus Christ is usually ignored and never tried.

Even the educational systems, colleges, universities in particular, are proponents of the abuse of freedom of speech to print, propagate, and shout profanities, obscenities, and the usual moral decay that flows readily from the corrupt and degenerate mind. The self-appointed intellectual geniuses seemingly cannot express themselves without profanity, gutter talk, and vulgarity. Yet, they claim to be the "educated ones." In our kind of world we have the weak, timid, cowardly compromisers who dare not raise objections lest they lose their positions, prestige, money, and power. The evil influence of profanity from the media has had a disastrous effect on the sensitivity of the minds of another generation to the point where God's name can be used with irreverence and profaned with impunity. What manner of depravity has captured our people to whom this is proper use of the freedom of speech?

### **A Futile Effort**

Our kind of world has been besieged with the idea that legislation and negotiation can produce a better generation. The failure of people to see that improvement and correction must begin in the hearts of people has given support to the idea that you can pass a law and that will solve it. When that does not solve, then pour money on it. Our kind of world has yet to come to grips with the inward man. The social reform programs, the "social gospel" of liberal religions, the "band-aids" of human invention have never, can never, and will never provide what mankind needs. Our world must learn of Christ, forgiveness, righteousness, purity, goodness, godliness, responsibility, and such like. Until that is a reality, our kind of world with all its havoc will dominate human existence for the most part.

### **The Gap**

Does it not strike you as significant that some create a generation gap between the older and younger generation, denouncing everyone over thirty, and on some misguided basis contending that inexperience, lack of knowledge, enthusiasm, emotionalism, subjectivism, and zest for life holds the key for every solution? The "pepsi" generation has shown more depravity in a few years than was evident for centuries prior to their time. The "baby-boomers" show no signs of even good sense in many regions. At least the "old hypocrites" of yesteryear had enough self-respect to pretend to know right from wrong, and tried to hide their wrong rather than blatantly, arrogantly, display it for all to see! Our kind of world runs against God in its disrespect for the elderly and the ways of old that have proven to be beneficial through the years. Some seem to think to parade vice is a virtue. Newness for the sake of newness is the watchword of many in our kind of world. Some who decry the hypocrisy among the elderly seem to think the elderly have a monopoly on hypocrisy. But how can any generation be serious about human rights, dignity, law, order, fairness, morality, etc. when authority is something just to be overturned? How can anyone consistently plead that we are nothing but beasts, having come from nowhere, here for no reason, no guidelines while here, and going nowhere but to the grave?

The failure of parents is a mark of our kind of world. The disrespect of the sacred by many of the young is characteristic of our kind of world. The situation is grave and the task for those who are determined to be what God teaches us to be becomes increasingly difficult and fraught with opposition.

Our kind of world is saturated with alcohol, suffering the ravages of drug abuse. The tragedy of ruined lives has no impact on those who promote it and profit from it. Lives, young and old, are lost due to the consumption of alcohol, drugs, etc. That the body is God's temple and should not be desecrated is dismissed. Money, not morals; gain, not God; profit, not purity is the god of our kind of world. We and our children live around it.

This is not pessimism but realism. We dare not deceive ourselves, nor be gullible and naive, blinding our eyes to the kind of world around us. God has created such a beautiful place for us to live, but sin scars it.

### **Only One Solution**

It's not "fun and games" religion some have adopted, but God's power to salvation (Romans 1:16). There is hope, joy, inner peace, and a good life open to all. There is the church patterned after God's blueprint. Unless we allow ourselves to become overly influenced by the world, we can lay hold on these good things. But we cannot bend down in fear and be intimidated, but meet the challenge.

Though the world be clouded with darkness, Jesus Christ is that ray of brightness for mankind. The way of Christ is not just a way, nor one among many ways, but THE way, and there is no other. Once we are convinced of that, then life takes on a different perspective, meaning, hope, purpose, and goal. This world is our field of labor, not our rest. Even though the world is contrary to our Savior, we persist. This world is not our final home. We are pressing toward heaven, just passing through this dark and sin-diseased habitation. When Jesus returns we shall enter into eternal bliss reserved for God's children.

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## **A Four Issue Series**

Beginning with the next issue, and for three additional issues, we shall concentrate on the themes of the **Sermon on the Mount**, as taught by Jesus and recorded in Matthew, chapter five, six, and seven. There will be a total of sixteen lessons in this series.



**JAMES W. BOYD**

As Bible students know, there are many varied subjects discussed by Jesus in that early sermon where He preached the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23). His sermon tells us the nature and many details that would be embodied in the kingdom that was soon to come, and did come on the first Pentecost after His resurrection. We hope the study will benefit us all.

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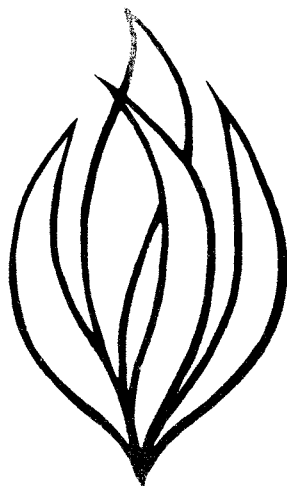
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# A Burning Fire



*"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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# **Sermon on the Mount**

## **Lesson One - Matthew 5:1-4**

Matthew one tells us of the announcement to Mary of the coming birth of Jesus. Matthew two records His birth and the events shortly thereafter until Jesus is taken to live in Nazareth. Matthew three reveals the preaching by John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus. Matthew four begins with the devil's temptation of Jesus and the beginning of His earthly ministry and preaching. *"From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* (Matthew 4:17). *"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease among the people."* (Matthew 4:23).

Matthew five, six, and seven gives us that sermon from some unnamed mount in Palestine that we call the Sermon on the Mount. Just what was that sermon? First we need to understand what that sermon is not, because many have assigned it a purpose and place that misses the mark. It was not just the presentation of an ethical code by which all human relationships might be developed. It was not simply a recipe to be happy. It is not a salve for the social suffering or a prescription for social reform. It is not just a moral code to smooth the social and civil conflicts. It is not the plan by which nations deal with nations, or something so broad as to include and embrace everything that is falsely called Christian in our world. While these elements may have some presence within the sermon, to consider it in such light is to bypass the Biblical definition of the sermon.

### **The Context**

This sermon, like every other portion of Scripture, must be studied in context. That would include John's announcement. *"Behold, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world."* (John 1:29). That was a major part of the preaching of John the Baptist. Jesus was

proclaimed as the One who would remove that which stood as a barrier between man and God; namely, SIN.

### **Gospel of the Kingdom**

It also must be considered in the context of the preaching of John and Jesus regarding the coming of the kingdom. John preached the kingdom of heaven was at hand, and so did Jesus. Just before the Holy Spirit had Matthew begin the Sermon on the Mount, He had Matthew to record how Jesus began preaching the gospel of the kingdom. The kingdom was soon to come. It had not come as yet, but was nigh, at hand. What Jesus was to preach was the message of the kingdom, that which characterized the kingdom, the revelation of the nature of the kingdom.

### **His Doctrine**

As the sermon closes the Holy Spirit had Matthew again to remark that what Jesus preached was "*his doctrine*" (Matthew 7:28). It was a doctrine that had not yet become applicable and would not until the kingdom came. But it was a distinctive body of doctrine that belonged to the kingdom and was uniquely that of Christ in contrast to all others, including the old covenant with Israel given through Moses. This sermon is the preamble to the new covenant or testament of Christ. Hebrews 10:9 notes that Christ came to take away the first in order to establish the second. This new covenant would not become effective until after His death (Hebrews 9: 16,17). But the Sermon on the Mount is a preview of the kingdom that would soon be established, indeed, was established on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ. This sermon announced the nature of that kingdom, the new dispensation and its character, a revelation of those things peculiar to the kingdom over which Christ would be King. The entire sermon was preached in contemplation of the kingdom that was nigh, and that, once established, would last until the end of time. It is a sermon that points to Pentecost and the church that began that day. It is in this context that this sermon must be studied. There is no accurate way to study it apart from the kingdom or church. It embodies the doctrine of which Christ is the author and founder.

which the church is to be the pillar and ground (First Timothy 3:15).

It is not a sermon just preached to Jews and not Christians, as John Clayton has contended. True, as yet there were no Christians when the sermon was preached, but it was the doctrine of the kingdom. With such error Clayton (a promoter of the new Jubilee Church, an apostate denomination) laid the foundation for the false doctrine that the things taught in the sermon are not binding on the church today. Many false doctrines float about trying to exclude people today from accountability to the doctrine of Christ. Clayton's doctrine is among the more blatant and obviously incorrect views of the Sermon on the Mount. Others would exclude it on the grounds that it was preached before Pentecost, therefore, has nothing to do with the new covenant. This, too, is a tragic view of the gospel of the kingdom which includes this sermon.

### **Beatitudes**

The introduction of the sermon is usually called the Beatitudes, from Matthew 5:1-2. The word beatitude means blessedness. Some have called it happiness. But blessedness, while it may include happiness, is more than that. Happiness is a joyful state because of what happens around us. It is a temporary condition created from without because of environmental conditions. Blessedness is a state of being, a spiritual condition, that results from being in the right relationship with God. It comes from within, having taken its roots in the conversion of the heart that results in the righteous way of life. The beatitudes describe the condition of those in the kingdom, the nature of those who are right with God because they are citizens in this spiritual kingdom that belongs to God. In this kingdom there is an inward peace, contentment, joy, blessedness that is not affected by the ever-changing environmental state in which one lives. This is a spiritual blessedness. Each beatitude is a statement of a gospel principle, a preview of the kingdom.

We now turn our attention to study only the first two of these principles or beatitudes, and will proceed

throughout the entire sermon line upon line. precept upon precept (Isaiah 28:10).

### **Poor in Spirit**

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for their's is the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 5:3). Often when people use the term poor they have reference to material things, or that which a person has or lacks. That is not the use of the term here. Man is a spirit. The phrase *"poor in spirit"* refers not to what a man has as much as what a man is. Such a person is one who realizes his dependence on something or someone other than himself. He is humbled by the reality that he is not self-sufficient. He accepts what Jeremiah taught, *"O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps."* (Jeremiah 10:23). The one who is *"poor in spirit"* depends on God for guidance. He does not put his trust in material things, man's wisdom, even his own wisdom, or human philosophies. He puts his trust in God and His Word. He is dependent on God.

With such a person God dwells. *"For thus saith the High and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite one."* (Isaiah 57:15). Such a one is destitute of pride and self-sufficiency.

Isaiah 35:8-10. *"And an highway shall there be, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for those, the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, but the redeemed shall walk there; and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."* This is a prophetic statement pertaining to the age of the church. Who is the *"fool"* of this passage? It speaks not of a simpleton, but is the same as the wayfaring man. It refers to a man who is unwise about the path he must travel. He is unfamiliar with the territory through which he must go. He is in need of guidance, and he recognizes that need. He is the



ransomed of the Lord who understands his dependence on God. They are the ones who travel the way of holiness.

While keeping this prophetic statement in mind, let us read from First Corinthians. Chapter one gives a contrast between human wisdom, Grecian philosophy, and divine revelation. Chapter two is a reminder from Paul that he did not bring his message of the gospel to them with "*excellency of speech*," which has no reference to oratorical manners, but refers to the way human philosophies were usually presented. His wisdom was not the wisdom of men but divine revelation, words which the Spirit teacheth. In chapter three he exhorted the Corinthian brethren "*to become a fool that he may be wise*." (Verse 18). What he was exhorting is that they might realize their dependence on God and God's wisdom and be wise, rather than rely on their on self-guidance without God. The fool of Isaiah and the fool of First Corinthians refers to the same humble, contrite people who are "*poor in spirit*," not proud, arrogant, self-sufficient, but those who follow the directions of the Almighty. Such would possess the kingdom of Christ.

### **They That Mourn**

Matthew 5:4, "*Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted*." While there are many passages that teach us that there is comfort for those who are weary, comfort for those in sorrow, comfort for those with trials and troubles, this passage is not teaching that. It is a passage that speaks of the nature of those in the kingdom. The mourning is a spiritual sorrow. It is to be understood in the context of the entire sermon; namely, having reference to the kingdom of Christ and His mission as deliverance from sin. Those who mourn in this passage do so because of their sins and the sins of those around them. They are grieved because of sin. They mourn because of the lost state of the world. They are those who look for a Savior from sin.

Inasmuch as salvation from sin was soon to become a reality in Christ and in His kingdom, they would be comforted upon entrance into that kingdom. Their comfort, for themselves and others, rested in the hope

that would be offered through Christ. We can be sure this is the significance of this beatitude when we consider some prophetic statements made on this subject

Isaiah 61:1,2, *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound. To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the days of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn."* This passage refers to that which Christ would do. It speaks of His mission of mercy and deliverance from sin. We can be sure of this application of this prophecy because Christ applied this prophecy to Himself. *"And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias (Isaiah). And when he had opened the book he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering the sight of the blind, and set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book and gave it again to the minister and sat down. And the eyes of all them, that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."* (Luke 4:17-21). The preaching to the poor, or the weak, was to those who were *"poor in spirit"* as mentioned in the first beatitude. The preaching that comforts those who mourn because of sin refers to the preaching of the gospel of salvation, the gospel of the kingdom, which Jesus was preaching. Comfort for the mournful was to be found in the coming of Christ and His kingdom.

A similar thought is presented in Matthew 28-30. There Jesus said, *"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart and ye shall find rest unto you souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* Those who are laden and burdened with sins shall find their rest in Christ. They are the same ones who mourn over their sins and the sins of the world. They shall have their comfort in Christ. This rest and comfort is to be enjoyed when one enters the

kingdom that was to come about three years after Jesus preached this sermon.

*"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make strait in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough place plain; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." (Isaiah 40:1-5).* This prophetic word to "*comfort ye my people*" by the coming of the Lord was accomplished in the work and message of John the Baptist in preparing the way for Christ, through whom comfort was to come (Matthew 3:3). It was John who preached the coming of the Lamb of God, and the kingdom in which there would be comfort by the forgiveness of sin. Comfort from sin is a fruit of the Lord and His kingdom that was nigh, at hand.

It becomes obvious that the second beatitude pointed to the kingdom and the relief and blessings that would belong to those in the kingdom. This kingdom had its beginning on Pentecost after the Lord's resurrection.

To briefly summarize this first lesson on the Sermon on the Mount, we remind you that the sermon is the gospel of the kingdom, the doctrine of Christ, the new covenant, the characteristics of the kingdom and those in it. Blessed are those who depend on God. Of such is the kingdom. Blessed are those who grieve over sin. Comfort is found in the kingdom.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Lesson Two - Matthew 5:5,6**

In this second lesson on the Sermon on the Mount, we intend to consider two more of the Beatitudes which are principles of the gospel, the gospel that would

characterize the kingdom that Jesus would establish. In our first lesson we studied the first two Beatitudes. Each of them begins with the word "*blessed*" which refers to a spiritual state that belongs to those that sustain a certain relationship with God. The "*blessed*" are those that would be citizens of this soon-coming kingdom, that is, soon to come in relation to the time the sermon was preached.

Just a brief word of review of the first lesson is in order. We noted how this Sermon on the Mount must be considered in its context, like every other passage of Scripture. The context involves the preaching of John with his reference to Christ, "*Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.*" (John 1:29). John's preaching also included, "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,*" (Matthew 4:17), a message also preached by Christ. The sermon is presented in view of the removal of that barrier between God and man, which is sin, and the establishment of that promised, prophesied, purposed, and planned kingdom which the redeemed would compose. The sermon is not merely a recipe of some kind of earthly happiness, nor a cure for all the social ills, political and civil strife of the world. It is more than another moral and ethical code. It is the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23), the doctrine of Christ (Matthew 7:28,29). It was presented by Christ, who was not just another interpreter or teacher of another law, but the Lawgiver with authority. The sermon is the preamble of the new covenant which He would establish. It is the forecast of the nature, character, and principles of the Lord's kingdom that would begin on Pentecost. It is a sermon that points to the church and magnifies it.

The first two Beatitudes are in Matthew 5:3,4. They teach that "*blessed*" are those who realize, appreciate they are wayfarers, strangers in a foreign land, passing through where they have never been before, in need of guidance and direction, who are without self-sufficiency, pride, but humble, contrite, and looking for God for their guidance. The kingdom belongs to such. Also, "*blessed*" are they that mourn over their sins and the sins of the world, that barrier between God and man. Their relief, comfort and rest is to be found in the mission of Christ

and by being citizens in the kingdom. Their comfort will result in the forgiveness provided by the Lord.

From the context of the sermon, from the Old Testament prophecies, especially from Isaiah that foretold the coming of the Christian age, the kingdom and the nature of it, we could establish these meanings.

### **The Meek**

Verse five, "*Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.*" In the minds of many, meekness is synonymous with being passive, timid, shy, almost submerged beneath an inferiority complex. But this is not the meaning of meekness. Numbers 12:3 reads, "*Now the man Moses was very meek, above all men which were upon the face of the earth.*" Now the terms shy, timid, passive, do not describe the man Moses. As we study his life we see a man of courage, strength, determination, power, outspoken, and aggressive. He was not a milquetoast type of character, withdrawn and unable to cope with things around him. He was nobody's pushover.

The basic element of meekness is inner mastery, self-control, a supremacy over one's own will, maintenance of one's faculties at all times, a strongly self-disciplined person. A meek person is as a captain of the ship on course, even through the stormy seas, but always in control, keeping the ship on course, even though the raging waves and storms are all around. One has remarked with a homemade definition of meekness as, "having the ability to idle your motor when all around you provokes you to strip your gears." Meekness is having great power, but having it under control.

How appropriate and encouraging this would be to the hearers of Jesus, many of whom would soon become citizens in the kingdom that would soon begin. They would be surrounded on every side by hostile elements, not only from the cruel Roman government, and the prejudices and persecutions that would be theirs to endure from the Jews. Paul warned brethren, "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*" (First Timothy 3:12). But those in the kingdom would be a self-disciplined people. They would

have self-mastery over themselves. They would radiate and propagate the message of God's kingdom throughout the earth in spite of opposition. The provocations of the wicked would not throw them off course nor defeat them.

The promise on inheriting the earth is not a literal, material inheritance. Such a thought prostitutes and degrades the higher and holier inheritance of the meek. The kingdom would not a material and earthly kingdom, but a spiritual one. The quality of character of those of the kingdom would enable them to cover the world with the principles of the kingdom, the gospel itself, the gospel that was being presented even with this sermon. In that sense they would inherit the earth.

Isaiah has said in prophecy of this kingdom. (Isaiah 61:1), "*Good tidings would be preached to the meek.*" The meek would in turn take those good tidings and cover the earth with the. Isaiah 11:9, "*For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*" This did not mean that all would conform to the message of the glad tidings, nor all would have the knowledge of God in their hearts. But it meant that the message of the gospel would stretch over the earth. Similarly, in Habakkuk 2:14, "*For the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*" It would be in this fashion that the meek would inherit the earth. It would be by the gospel story that they would teach and exemplify in their lives and spread in the world.

The phrase, "*inherit the earth.*" is much like words in the commission given to Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:10), "*See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build and to plant.*" Jeremiah was not to become a military conqueror of the kingdoms and nations. Nor would he become a magistrate ruling over them as some kind of monarch. But as a teacher of the message of God he would be superior over all kingdoms and nations and would dominate them through the message he proclaimed.

Again, First Corinthians 16:2, "*Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?*" Paul did not mean that

Christians would command the courts and be the judges among men in that sense. But as they taught the teaching and doctrine of Christ and the principles of the kingdom, those principles and doctrine would indict the world and pass judgment upon it through them.

This beatitude is but another forecast of the spread of the gospel of the kingdom and the character of that which was soon to come, and did come with Pentecost. The disciplined of the kingdom would cover the earth with the gospel.

### **Those That Hunger and Thirst**

*"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."* (Matthew 5:6). Let us focus attention on the word "*righteousness*" and determine its meaning. It is not a reference here to the virtues of God or His quality, or how good God is. It is used in the same sense as it is used in Romans 1:16,17. *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation, to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, The just shall live by faith."* The term refers to God's plan for making sinful man righteous before God. It is the system of justification. It means God's laws and commandments by which man is made righteous. It is used in the same sense as in Psalm 119:172, *"All thy commandments are righteousness."* The commandments that God has given to man is for the purpose of making man righteous, or better yet, leading man to partake of the righteousness God gives him. It is that scheme of redemption revealed first through Christ and the inspired apostles, and now in the inspired Scriptures.

The goodness of God and His virtues are even found in the Old Testament. One does not have to wait until he reaches the gospel to know of such things about God. But only in the gospel does one find the way that God saves man and justifies him even from his sins.

The term "*righteousness*" is used similarly in Romans 10:3, *"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not*

*submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.*" Paul was speaking of his Jewish fellow countrymen. Instead of following God's system of salvation through Christ, they were persisting in going their own way and following their own system and the Law of Moses which was already nailed to the cross when Paul wrote.

Again, Matthew 5:20, *"For I say unto you. Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter the kingdom of heaven."* Jesus was telling them that they just had to live better lives than the scribes and Pharisees and according to a better system. He was not telling them they must do more good works, be more deserving of salvation. This would smack of a system of salvation by meritorious works. We have heard this verse used to try to prove the Christian ought to give more than ten per cent of his income because the scribes and Pharisees gave that much and we must do more than they. While that may have some merit, that is not the import nor meaning of the phrase.

Jesus was comparing the Mosaic system that the scribes and Pharisees followed with the kingdom that was soon to come. The comparison of systems was not one of degree of virtues, but of kind and substance. No one can reach heaven by following the traditions, customs, doctrines of men, even the Law of Moses to which the scribes and Pharisees were outwardly committed. One must soon follow another system; namely, God's plan for making man righteous as is revealed in the gospel of the kingdom.

Jesus is teaching that those who have the appetite for God's scheme and plan of redemption for man shall be well supplied, and find their fill, in the kingdom that was soon to come. Again, the beatitude, like the others, is pointing toward the kingdom, the church. All who hunger for God's way will find their satisfaction and provision in the kingdom.

To summarize the first four beatitudes let us say, blessed are they who realize their need of guidance and their dependence on God, who are humble enough to seek



God's guidance and who do not simply rely upon themselves or on other men.

Blessed as they who are disturbed and mourn over sin that separates man from God, for in Christ and His kingdom they shall find the rest and comfort from that grief for which they yearn.

Blessed are those who possess that inner mastery and self-control. In spite of opposition, they shall cover the earth with the gospel principles and the kingdom shall penetrate the world.

Blessed are those who want God's way and have the appetite for the salvation He offers. By coming to Christ and entering His kingdom they shall find that for which they are seeking.

Keep in mind the context of the sermon and how it points toward Pentecost. It is a sermon that exalts Christ and the church, and how the blessings of God are bestowed through Christ upon those in the church.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Lesson Three - Matthew 5:7-12**

Without giving time and space to further review, for this is not as needful in writing as it would be in speaking, and having gone over the first two lessons with reviews, let us pursue the study of the kingdom, defining the nature and charter of the kingdom that would soon be established, and was established on Pentecost. We have the doctrine of Christ and the preamble of His way in this sermon of the gospel of the kingdom.

#### **The Merciful**

"*Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.*" (Matthew 5:7). This beatitude reflects the quality of forgiveness, that forgiving spirit of God that is a prominent trait of God and a prominent characteristic of the blessings enjoyed in the kingdom.

God is merciful and extends His mercy to man through forgiveness of sin, that which separates man from God. The system of salvation is a system of mercy and grace or unmerited favor. Titus 3:5 teaches, "*He saved us.*" How did He save us? Included in that which produces salvation is the mercy of God. But the beatitude emphasizes that to be a recipient of God's mercy, we are expected to be merciful. To be forgiven, we must be forgiving.

That we are saved by the grace of God is an indisputable point in the doctrine of Christ. "*For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.*" (Ephesians 2:8,9). Without God's grace there would be no forgiveness available.

In the parable of the wicked servant (Matthew 18:21-25), we are taught the Lord's displeasure with the unwillingness to forgive. That is made clear. That wicked servant received mercy but would not extend mercy. Matthew 6:14,15, "*For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*" To obtain mercy we must extend mercy. This beatitude is a preview of the system of mercy that is a part of the plan of salvation, a part of the kingdom of God.

### **Pure in Heart**

Matthew 5:8, "*Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.*" Many passages of the Bible exhort us to moral purity, such as, "*keep thyself pure,*" (First Timothy 5:22), and "*keep thy heart with all diligence,*" (Proverbs 4:23), and "*whatsoever things are pure... think on these things,*" (Philippians 4:8). But this passage does not refer to moral purity, but to purity of understanding. The phrase, "*for they shall see God,*" unlocks the meaning of the purity that is under consideration. They shall "*see,*" have a clear perception and understanding. The term "*pure*" is used in this beatitude as it is in James 4:8, "*Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.*" The double-minded person is one who is

confused, mixed up, lacking clear perception and without understanding. He thinks one way then another, or both at the same time, and is in chaotic bewilderment. His vision is unclear. But the person with the purity of heart of which this verse speaks is one who sees things straight, gets them in order, has the truth unmixed from the elements of error, and comprehends that truth.

Ephesians 1:18. Paul prayed for brethren that "*the eyes of your understanding being enlightened*" shows he wanted them to "see" things clearly with understanding and not be double-minded. It is with the heart that one understands (Matthew 13:15). Those of a pure heart are those who perceive, comprehend, and understand, not being defiled with error and misinterpretation, but having a pure heart.

It is said of them that they shall "*see God*." John 3:3 also uses the phrase that one cannot see the kingdom except he is born again. One cannot have the right relationship with God outside the kingdom. Not until one's view of God is proper, and he understands what the will of God is, can he or will he enter the kingdom.

The kingdom, then, in prospect as the Lord preached, the kingdom that was soon come, is made up of those whose hearts know the truth. They are in that blessed state of being right with God. This beatitude simply expresses another mark of distinction that characterizes that kingdom which was to begin on Pentecost. It is another Pentecost pointer.

### **The Peacemakers**

Matthew 5:9, "*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God*." What is the peace under consideration? There are several ways in which one might have peace. He can be at peace with other people. There may be a difference and dispute, but that can be settled, and they can be at peace. But the peace under consideration here is far more than that which can exist between people. As we look around us we find many people who are at peace with each other, but are not right with God spiritually. The peace Jesus teaches is more precise and distinctive.

Christ is called the Prince of Peace in prophecy (Isaiah 9:6). The peace that He brings is peace between man and God. It is reconciliation. *"And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby."* (Ephesians 2:16). *"And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven."* (Colossians 1:20). Man alienates and separates himself from God by sins (Isaiah 59:1,2). We sell our souls to Satan by sinning. Christ makes peace by providing forgiveness of sin. *"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Romans 5:1). This peace is accomplished through the cross (Colossians 1:20). The peace of which Jesus speaks is spiritual peace, the removal of the barrier between man and God. Once man is reconciled to God all is well with his soul.

Who are the peacemakers? Christ is the primary peacemaker. Those disciples who would tell people how to have peace with God are peacemakers. Romans 10:15. *"How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things."* When one tells the story of salvation, the plan of redemption, the good news of Christ as Savior, he is being a peacemaker.

Peace with God can belong only to those who come to the kingdom. We enter that kingdom by obeying the commands of the gospel of peace. The Lord is saying that the nature and composition of that kingdom would be people who are at spiritual peace with God. As they perform their duty as children of God they will be messengers of the gospel of peace and would assume the role of peacemaker.

### **The Persecuted**

The final beatitude embraces three verses, but they are connected in thought. 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 persecute 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."*

One thing that can be expected by those in the kingdom of Christ is opposition. Christians shall be buffeted from every side by hostile elements, ideologies, people and actions. Because one is loyal to Christ he will arouse the antagonism from those who do not love Christ. *"All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."* (First Timothy 3:12). Persecution, though not sought and even avoided when possible, is a normal course of events and will characterize existence in the kingdom. But in the midst of being subjected to railing, abuse, false accusations, misrepresentation, threats, injustices, and injuries of one sort or another, those in the kingdom can endure them. Such things can be turned into advantages when rightly considered. We have God's promise that we shall not be tempted above that we are able to bear. We shall have a way of escape (First Corinthians 10:13).

James 1:2-4,12, *"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing... Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord promised to them that love him."*

First Peter 4:16, *"Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf."* The early church was persecuted but they rejoiced *"that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name."* (Acts 5:41).

While such a preview of the kingdom might discourage entrance into it, it would also impress the fact that those in the kingdom would be at war with the forces of evil and the kingdom of Satan. Christians would be in the world, but not of the world. Yet, the world would be against the kingdom of Christ. To the Hebrew Christians, *"But call to remembrance the former days in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions, partly, whilst ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions, and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used."* (Hebrews 10:32,33).

The first citizens of the kingdom of Christ were not the first to suffer for righteousness sake. God's prophets of the Old Testament down through the ages were victimized by those who loved evil and refused to hear God's word. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Micah, Elijah, Elisha, all of them were the targets of evil men.

Nonetheless, the reward of those in the kingdom is great. *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."* (Romans 8:18). The kingdom shall be delivered to God (First Corinthians 15:24), when the Lord comes again. *"If we suffer, we shall also reign with him."* (Second Timothy 2:12). *"For great is your reward in heaven."* (Matthew 5:12).

When one considers the alternative to being in the kingdom, that is, being out of the kingdom, when he realizes the eternal hell that awaits, the hardships of citizenship pale into insignificance, especially in view of the everlasting nature of the reward.

One final observation on this beatitude, and that is the necessity of remaining faithful therein. Jesus is saying that there may well be hard times for those who come into His kingdom that He is describing. But even under such persecution, we cannot turn back if the blessings of God would be enjoyed. We must remain faithful in the kingdom against all opposition.

As the sermon progresses, we shall find expansion of these precepts. There will be applications of these principles. He will teach a specific doctrine based upon what is included in these beatitudes. The Sermon on the Mount is the doctrine of Christ, and the beatitudes open the way for us to see more clearly the nature of the kingdom over which He reigns as the eternal King.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Have you ever taken time to open your Bible, concentrate on a specific passage until the meaning is clear to you? Try it!**

## **Lesson Four - Matthew 5:13-16**

Thus far we have noted two Biblical identifications of this sermon preached by Jesus. One, it is described as the doctrine of Christ, His doctrine (Matthew 7:28,29). It is not an interpretation of a law that was given by Moses or scribes and Pharisees, but the presentation of a new law by the Lawgiver, as one having authority. Two, it is called the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23). This refers to the kingdom that at the time the sermon was preached was still in the future, but the kingdom of God that did come on Pentecost. The sermon is the preamble of the new covenant, the forecast and preview of the nature and characteristics of that kingdom that was to come, over which Christ now reigns as King of kings.

### **Similitudes**

We have considered eight beatitudes, pronouncements of blessedness upon those of certain quality. Those in the kingdom would possess a certain relationship with God: namely, citizens in His kingdom. We now turn to the study of three similitudes in Matthew 5:13-16. A similitude is kin to the parable and allegory in that there is a presentation of likeness between two things. There is a comparison made between things that have similarity. Jesus presents the kingdom and the members of it in the likeness of things with which His hearers, and we as readers, have some understanding. This enables us to learn something about the kingdom. We must keep before us the truth that the kingdom is the church. Christ in reality is exalting the church in the Sermon on the Mount. It strikes us as somewhat strange how some today are repelled at preaching about the church, considering it to be rather insignificant, but the Lord Jesus spent His first sermon exalting it.

### **Salt**

*"Ye are the salt of the earth, but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is henceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under the foot of men."* (Matthew 5:13).

In this comparison Jesus takes recognition of the fact that the kingdom would be in the world, even though it would not be of the world. It is not a worldly, earthly, physical kingdom, but a spiritual one. Nonetheless, the citizens are living in the world. The "ye" refers to those who would be in the kingdom, those who would be Christians. Christians are like salt, which emphasizes the desired effect and influence the Christian is to have on the world around him.

Consider the work and power of salt. Salt possesses a savour or a flavor, a quality of influence with various powers. It has the power to season. It can be an antidote to corruption. It is useful in healing and cleansing. It has the power to preserve, to save, to prevent corruption. It can create thirst, and even be used in melting ice.

But if the salt has lost its good and useful qualities, it is of not value, but only deserving of being discarded. So it is with the Christian who does not retain his beneficent influence in the world. Without the influence of the Christian, to what can the world turn, and where can the world look to find the qualities that are so needful?

The good powers like salt that the Christian possesses do not come inherently from himself, but are derived from the Christ. As is taught in John 15:5, "*Without me ye can do nothing.*" As a branch apart from the vine cannot produce fruit and fulfill its mission, so the salt (Christian) cannot preserve, save, flavor, cleanse, etc. without Christ. When the salt (Christian) has lost his savour or quality of good influence, he is deserving of being cast out.

What causes salt to lose its power and valuable qualities? Being mixed with clay, or some alien and foreign substance, becoming adulterated or corrupted in some manner, contaminates the salt. So long as the salt is pure it is potent in its powers. The same is true regarding the Christian, the citizen of the kingdom. When the Christian becomes tainted and corrupted with sin, he is "*good for nothing.*" This is the trouble, possibly, with much that is called "Christianity."



Only in the kingdom is there hope for mankind. Therein is salvation. Therefore, it is of the utmost priority that the church be kept pure. It must be pure in doctrine, preaching sound doctrine (Titus 2:1), sound speech that cannot be condemned (Titus 2:8), neither going beyond or taking from but abiding within the doctrine of Christ (Second John 9-11), not speaking the doctrines of men (Matthew 15:9), but speaking as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11).

Likewise, members of the church must keep themselves pure in their manner of life. They must keep themselves unspotted from the world (James 1:27). A church member who will persist in sin is corrupted and cannot serve as he ought in the kingdom of God. When there is such contamination, the Christian has lost his savour, and becomes deserving of being a castaway.

### **Light**

*"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house."* (Matthew 5:14,15).

Christians are compared to light. Several times in Scripture is such a comparison made. Ephesians 5:8 refers to Christians as children of light. Peter calls his brethren children of the day. Philipppians 2:15 admonishes the Christian to "*shine as lights in the world.*" Colossians 1:13 says the Christian has been delivered out of the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of the Son of His love. Being in the kingdom is like being in the light.

Light serves good and beneficial purposes. Visibility is the primary benefit. *"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."* (Second Corinthlians 4:6).

Light will drive out darkness. For this reason some who love the darkness of sin do not love the Christ nor those who reflect His light. *"And this is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness*

*rather than light because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be manifest that they are wrought in God."* (John 3:19-21).

Much of the vegetable kingdom could not survive but for a short time if there was the total deprivation of light. Light is life-giving. Light is life-sustaining, as well as necessary for sight.

The church, or kingdom, is to be God's light in this world of sin and darkness. Light and darkness are often used to contrast righteousness and sin.

The light of the Christian comes from a source other than himself. In reality, the Christian serves as a reflector of the brilliance of the Son of God.

The light of the Christian can be dimmed, and often is. Jesus used the simple illustration of men lighting candles in order to receive light. It would be senseless to put that candle under a cover or bushel. That would destroy the usefulness of the light. Men put candles on candlesticks that they may benefit from the light. The Christian is to let his light shine. *"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 5:16). By good words, good deeds, day to day consistency in imitating Christ in life, holding fast the word of truth, the influence of the Christian contributes to good.

The motive for righteous living is not that men may praise you, but that they may glorify the Father whom you serve. Is it not worth our consideration that we may well distort the light of Christ what we are supposed to reflect because of our misdeeds? Can people really get a fair and proper impression of what it means to be a Christian by observing our lives?

There is a difference between letting your light shine, which we ought to do, and just shining our light for others to see us, which is promote self, not God.

### **City on a Hill**

Also in these verses the kingdom is presented as a city set on a hill. Just as a city on a hill is in plain view and cannot be hid, so should it be with the kingdom of God. God's kingdom, His church, universally and locally, when it is as it ought to be, is something with which must be reckoned. It cannot be ignored. It will have an impact for truth in the community and nation round about. Even though some might war against the kingdom, and disagree with its message, the kingdom must be determined to preach the Word, stand for it, get the message out to others, contend earnestly for the faith. It should strive to be an influence in the community that others must consider. It will be forceful, militant, aggressive, and dedicated to the upholding of God's will, and will busily engage itself in encouraging everyone to do the same. All the power of influence that the church has must be mustered together to promote "*this saith the Lord*" whenever and wherever possible.

Just as the city on the horizon stands out, so God wants His kingdom to stand out as the peculiar people in the world. The peculiarity must be because of the distinctiveness of life that is lived by those in the kingdom.

Each of these three similitudes, the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the city set on a hill, makes it incumbent on each Christian to strive to develop and possess those qualities of influence on the world in which he lives. The Christian is not to be a hermit, nor pull within his shell. He is intended to make a difference in what goes on by demonstrating the way of holiness as prescribed by Christ.

Following these similitudes, Christ turns His attention in the Sermon of the Mount to specific matters that characterize His doctrine.

\* \* \* \* \*

**The next few issues of  
A Burning Fire  
will be devoted to the  
Sermon on the Mount.**

## **One Way to Prevent and End Apostasy**

Those who keep abreast of what takes place in the wonderful brotherhood of brethren know that the Lord's church has suffered terribly in recent decades a drift from the truth. Many have quoted the observation, "Brethren, we are drifting." But in reality many have already drifted, probably beyond the point of recovery.

Few things could be counted more tragic than to see people who were once faithful in the Lord turn away and follow Him no more. We read of people doing that in the Scriptures. The descriptions of such behavior are very disturbing to those who love the souls of brethren. But even entire congregations, where once the sound doctrine of truth was preached, are so far removed from their moorings that they cannot be truthfully called a church of Christ anymore. They have become a denomination born of apostasy. Could it have been prevented?

We are confident that no congregation has to drift as so many have done. One way that will prevent the problem from getting the upper hand, and if not prevent it can correct it, is for those in leadership to properly discharge their responsibility. They have the authority to do it. Too many times they are lacking in conviction, fearful, seeking their own popularity and acceptance, loving the praises of men more than the truth.

They must insist that truth, and only truth, be taught from the pulpit and classroom. They must convict the gainsayer, confront and mark the false teacher, not allow him to continue sowing the seeds of digression.

Far too often those in charge endorse, promote, even encourage the very ones who will take the church away from the truth. They should know better, could know better, and some do know better, but they allow it anyway. What a woeful day the day of judgment will be to such wicked shepherds!

It is not true to say that nothing can be done about what is making havoc in the church. When those in leadership act as God would have them do, this thing could be prevented, stopped, even turned around. JB



## **Confusion Doth Reign**

In relatively recent days there were two very controversial issues raging in our nation at the same time. One was over the death penalty and the execution of a convicted multi-murderer, and the other over the right of women to abort unborn babies. Great numbers were shouting and demonstrating on both sides of these matters. But what struck me as so amazing is how some people, even the same people, can clamor so viciously for the protection of the guilty, and be just as aggressive for the murder of the innocent. Capital punishment is allowed by God's Word, but the murder of innocent unborn children is not. How can a nation survive when its people get things so backwards? JB

## *The Last Word*

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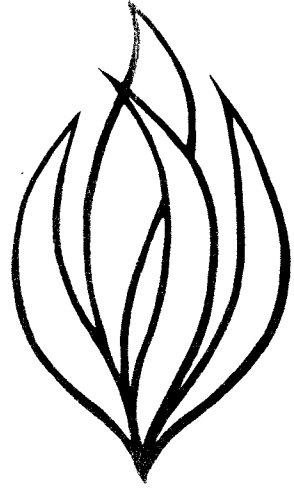
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# A Burning Fire



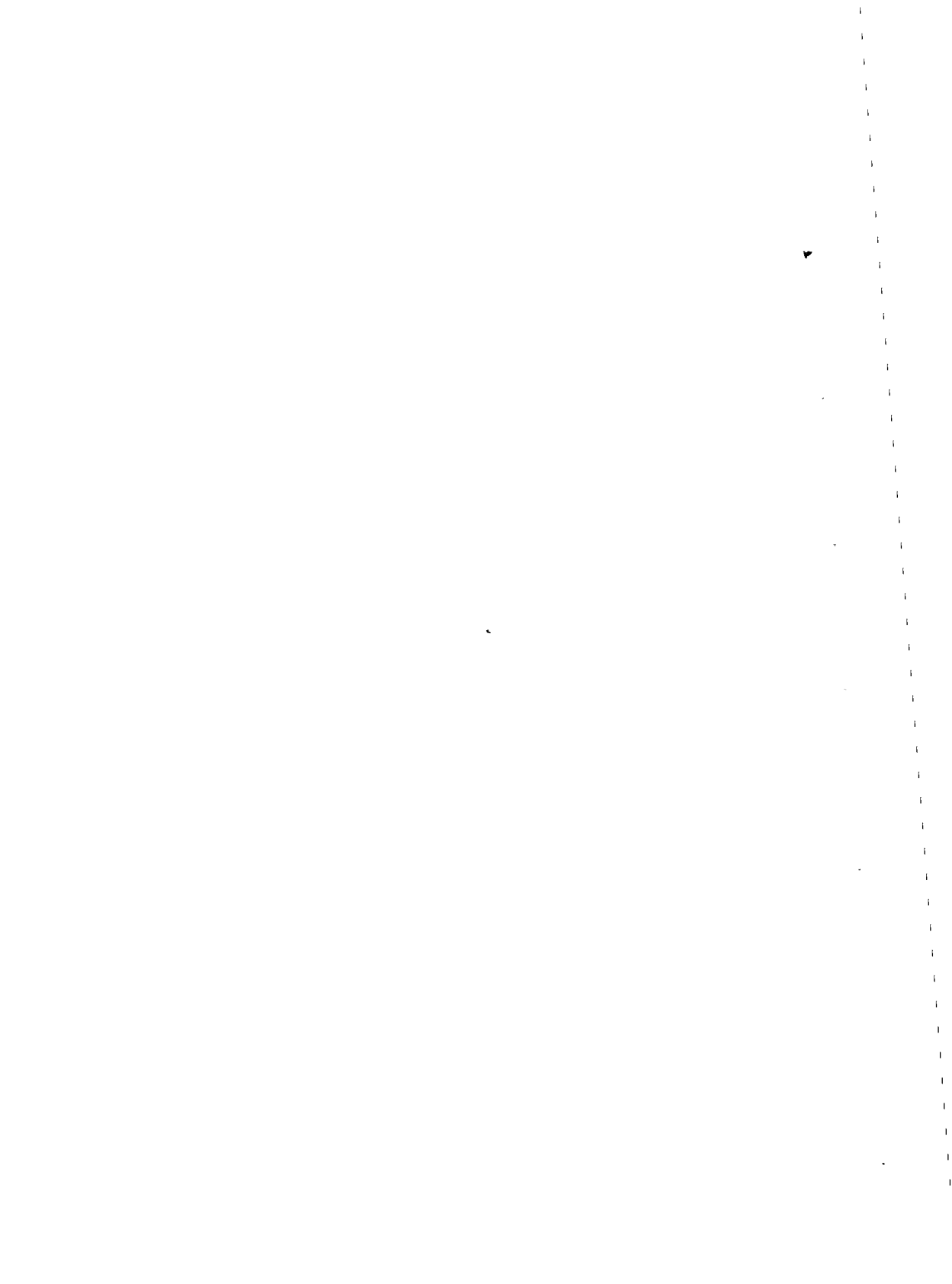
*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,  
and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*



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# ***Sermon on the Mount***

## **Lesson Five - Matthew 5:17-20**

We have come to the place in the study of the Sermon on the Mount where Christ no longer speaks in the generalities of the Beatitudes and Similitudes of the first portion of the sermon, but directs His attention to specific precepts of His doctrine.

Keep in mind that the Sermon on the Mount is the doctrine of Christ, the gospel of the kingdom, preached in anticipation of the coming of the kingdom that did come on Pentecost. The sermon is a forecast, a preview, of the nature and characteristics of His spiritual kingdom. Through the remainder of chapter five He speaks of specific matters, two of which we shall consider in this lesson. Both have to do with the superiority of the system of Christ over everything else that has gone before Him, whether from God or from man. He speaks of the relationship between the Old Testament under Moses and the New Testament of which He is the mediator. He also contrasts His will with the customs and traditions of men.

### **Fulfill, Not Destroy**

*"Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; and whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 5:17,18).

We now concern ourselves with a source of great religious confusion and false doctrines in the religious world. There is no conflict between the law given through Moses and the covenant of Jesus Christ. The law preceded the new covenant by some fifteen hundred years and was given to

Israel, through Moses, by the Lord. Christ did not come to destroy the law, or destroy the work done by the prophets who lived and labored under that law. Paul teaches that He did abolish it (Ephesians 2:15). There is a difference between destroying and abolishing which we shall discuss.

Let us consider some other Biblical statements that tell us what Christ did and what happened to the old law. Colossians 2:14 teaches it was done away, abolished, and taken away. Galatians four uses an Old Testament event to show the relationship of the two covenants. Abraham had a son by his wife, a freewoman, named Sarah. Sarah and the son Isaac represented the new law. Abraham also had a son named Ishmael by Hagar, Sarah's handmaid, a bondwoman. Hagar and Ishmael represented the old law. When time came when there was no place for both Isaac and Ishmael, Paul asks, *"What saith the scriptures? Cast out the bondwoman and her son..."* (Galatians 4:30). Christians are the children of the freewoman, not the bondwoman. Christians live under the new covenant, not the old covenant God gave Israel.

Even though Christ did not destroy the old law, He did remove it by fulfilling it. If He had destroyed it, there would have been nothing left to fulfill. He took it out of the way by accomplishing that for which the law was given. *"Then he said, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first that He may establish the second."* (Hebrews 10:9). The old law was to be temporary. *"But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterward be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster."* (Galatians 3:23-25).

### **The Law Was Not Contrary to the Promise**

The law of Moses was not contrary to or against the promises of God (Romans 7:7). They brought us to the fulfillment of those promises (Galatians 3:25). God gave certain promises to Abraham, including the promise that through his seed all families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3; 28:14). Paul said that seed was Christ (Galatians 3:16). The fulfillment of the promise was not the giving of the law, but Christ fulfilled the promise, and

the purpose of the law. *“Brethren, I speak after the manner of men, Though it be but a man’s covenant, yet, if it be confirmed, no man disannuleth, or addeth thereto. Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promises, but God gave it to Abraham by promise.”* (Galatians 3:15-18).

### **Why Was the Law Given?**

Why, then, was the law given? We have already learned it was to bring to Christ (Galatians 3:24). While it did not provide for the forgiveness of sin, it did define sin (Romans 7:7).. It was added as a guide for Israel, the nation through which the Messiah was to come, because of their transgressions (Galatians 3:19). But what that old law could not do, the Christ accomplished. *“For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did, by the which we draw nigh unto God.”* (Hebrews 7:19). *“For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.”* (Hebrews 8:7). We cannot be saved by the old law. *“Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”* (Romans 3:20). *“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”* (Romans 3:28). The law served as a shadow of things to come (Hebrews 10:11).

During the life of Jesus on earth the law was still in effect for the Jews. Jesus was born of a woman, made under the law (Galatians 4:4). When Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount the law was still in effect. To teach men to break that law was to teach them to disregard the authority of the Lord. But those who would be in His kingdom that was to come would be people who had respect for the authority of God. They would not teach men to break any command of God. Whether it was the old law, or whether it would be the new law, when God had spoken, it would be characteristic of those in the kingdom to respect His will and teach others to do so as well. What Jesus is teaching is that the old law would be brought to an end, but meanwhile, respect for the

authority of God was important. Not even the smallest portion of it was subject to human alteration. The jot and tittle were the smallest marks of Hebrew writing. Even such minute things were not to be bothered. "*Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.*" (Deuteronomy 12:32). This principle was true under the old law and also under the new (Galatians 1:6-9; Second John 9-11; Revelation 22:18,19).

Christ brought the Mosaic Law to an end. Luke 24:44 tells us that Christ did what He did "*that all things must be fulfilled.*" Acts 13:29 teaches that those who crucified Christ "*had fulfilled all that was written of him.*" Romans 10:4 reads, "*For Christ is the end of the law...*"

### **Modern Versions Pervert**

It is noteworthy that the so-called modern versions of the Bible distort this passage in the Sermon on the Mount, making it teach differently than what God has taught. The TEV says that Christ said He did not come to do away with the old law. But the Bible says repeatedly that He did do away with it. The TEV says He came to give it meaning. But it had meaning before Christ ever came. Christ did not give it meaning, but fulfilled the meaning. Nearly all of the modern versions have Christ saying He did not abolish the old law, but also has Paul saying that He did abolish it (Ephesians 2:15), which would be an inexplicable contradiction between Christ and Paul. What is so tragic is that our own brethren, particularly those in Bible departments of schools operated by our own brethren, are promoting these perverted Bibles and teaching our young that they are reliable versions of God's Word. They are not, and those who teach that they are do the church of Christ and His cause a serious disservice. Fatal doctrinal error does not seem to be of great concern to some of our "scholars" as much as their acceptance by the academic community. Parents who send their children to the "Christian schools" must be aware that false ways are being taught and promoted on campuses with a passion.

Who is the authority in matters religious is plainly revealed in the New Testament. "*Whatsoever ye do in*

*word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.*" (Colossians 3:17). To do something "*in the name of*" someone means by their authority. "*The law came by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ.*" (John 1:17). We are made free by the truth (John 8:32), not by the law of Moses. God made Christ preeminent over all things (Colossians 1:18). All authority belongs to Him (Matthew 28:18). In the presence of the lawgiver, Moses, and the great prophet under that law, Elijah, God said, "*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Hear ye him.*" (Matthew 17:5). Can there be any doubt in any honest mind that Christ is the way, truth, and life (John 14:6)? His way is not a postscript to the old law. It is a new covenant (Hebrews 10:20). "*He hath made the first old.*" (Hebrews 8:13). God now speaks through Christ (Hebrews 1:1).

The failure to understand the relationship between the law of Moses and the law of Christ has caused many to attempt to bring certain things in the old law into the Christian realm for which they have no authority from Christ. Such things as observing the Sabbath Day, instrumental music, burning incense, a special priesthood, observing holydays, abstaining from meats, such things are part of the old law that was nailed to the cross. People say you can be saved by keeping the Ten Commandments. But the Ten Commandments were a part of that law that God gave to Israel through Moses. We are not under the Ten Commandments. Nine of the ten have been embraced in Christ's covenant, with some expansion on them. But we do not steal because of the authority of Christ, not Moses. We must understand this distinction between the law or we allow ourselves to be subject to many false views and doctrines that men teach in religion.

### **Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees**

*"For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."* (Matthew 5:20).

The Lord slightly changes the subject under discussion, but not very much. He had been comparing the law of Moses with His own law, but now He compares His law with that which governed and guided the Pharisees and

scribes. One might at first think that the scribes and Pharisees were guided by the law of Moses, but this is not accurate. They made a pretense of being guided by that law, but they had added to their religious regulations their many traditions, customs, and rituals that they considered as binding as that which had come from God.

Consider the word "*righteousness*." It has the same meaning here as it does in Romans 1:16,16 where Paul said the gospel revealed God's righteousness. He was not talking about a virtuous attribute of God, but rather the way God makes man righteous, the way of justification. The commands of God when believed and obeyed will make a man righteous because of the merit of Christ. Righteousness refers to God's plan and the system of salvation under Christ in contrast with the system that the scribes and Pharisees advocated.

One of the problems that the Jews had was expressed in Romans 10:3. "*For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.*" The Jews were ignorant of the way that God intended to save man. They were insistent on their own way. Therefore, they had not submitted to the way of the Lord.

Matthew 15:3,6,9, "*Why do you also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?*" "*Thus ye have made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition.*" "*But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*" What we are taught at this point is that we must follow a system that exceeds the system the scribes and Pharisees were following. Jesus is showing the superiority of His doctrine over any human tradition, custom, or whatever. Not only was the system of salvation through Christ superior to that from man, but it was superior to that which had been given through Moses.

\* \* \* \* \*

**If you change your address, please let me know. JB**

## **Lesson Six - Matthew 5:21-30**

We have been considering this sermon in its context and according to the scriptural definition of it. It was preached at the outset of the personal ministry of Christ. It was preached in the light of the teaching of John the Baptist that Jesus was the "*Lamb of God*" (John 1:29). It was in anticipation of the coming of the kingdom (Matthew 4:17). It was the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23). It was the doctrine of Christ (Matthew 7:28,29). It was a preview and forecast of the nature and characteristics of the kingdom that came on Pentecost.

The sermon was introduced by the Beatitudes, which were pronouncements of blessings upon these of certain quality and relationship with God. They were followed by Similitudes, certain comparisons the Lord made to describe to us the nature of the kingdom, like salt, light, and a city set on a hill.

Then He turned to specific precepts of His doctrine. He discussed the relationship of the old law that God gave through Moses, and the way of the scribes and Pharisees which included human traditions and customs, and the superiority and sufficiency of God's way through Christ. He emphasized the prohibition of man tampering with the revealed authority of God. We turn our attention to two other precepts of the gospel of the kingdom; namely, the sin of hatred and animosity, and the sin of a lustful look. Both have to do with morality and conduct toward one another.

### **Murder and Hate**

*"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment; and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council; but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore, if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy*

*gift. Agree with thine adversaries quickly, while thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.*" (Matthew 5:21-26).

The Mosaic law commanded, "*Thou shalt not kill.*" (Deuteronomy 5:17; Exodus 20:1). This meant, "*Thou shalt not murder.*" Murder has become a very prominent sin of our society. The command did not forbid all taking of human life. At times it was permitted, even commanded, in such as war, and capital punishment. What was prohibited by the command was murder. There is a difference. Even in the New Testament the government is given the power to defend its authority in war and capital punishment (Romans 13:4). But the deliberate, intentional, purposeful taking of innocent human life, motivated by hatred and the desire to dispose of another, was prohibited. Respect for the dignity and sacredness of human life is a part of God's requirement because man is created in the image of God.

The scribes and Pharisees had expanded on that law to include, "*Whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment.*" which meant that those who violated God's law would also face the Jewish tribunals, councils, and other courts, leading to their punishment.

But the law of the kingdom is more far reaching than this. A hostile heart, one full of scorn, contempt, and hatred makes one liable to the verdicts of judgment. It deals with anger, an attitude of the heart. To speak the word, "*Raca,*" was to speak with such reproach. It was to accuse one of looseness of life and morals. Those who would so accuse would be called to prove the charge. Making irresponsible charges against others would not be characteristic of those who made up the kingdom.

To say, "*Thou fool,*" with hatred toward another as if they were wicked and reprobate when they were not, would place the soul in jeopardy. Those in the kingdom would not entertain hatred of people, even though they hated the wickedness and evil some people commit. Murder was wrong under the old law, as well as the new.



But hatred is also a sin under the doctrine of the Christ, even though murder may never take place. To hate is a sin just as murder is sin. *"Whosoever hateth his brother in a murderer, and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him."* (First John 3:15). The superiority of the gospel system is seen in that it cuts to the heart, motive, and mind of a person as well as discerning his evil and outward deeds. It includes attitudes as well as actions.

### **Affects Worship**

Just how serious this matter is can be seen in the fact that one's worship is discounted if the heart be burdened with ill-will, resentment, grudges, and animosity toward others. Such must be purged from the heart before the gift of sacrifice is acceptable. One may have differences with another without having an evil heart of hatred toward the other. He will seek reconciliation and agreement. Those in the kingdom prefer to settle differences on the basis of God's Word rather than hold grudges that stifle the present and harass the future.

The Lord warns that when one has a justified cause to be opposed to you, you do better to settle the matter, lest by your unwillingness to do so be the reason for a greater hardship to come upon you. Few things are more destructive to a person than one who is in error but stubbornly persists in that wrong. Christ shows that the heart of the citizens of His kingdom will be of a different and more noble quality.

### **Lust and Adultery**

*"Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time. Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. But if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee; for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell."* (Matthew 5:27-30).

Jesus is teaching that lusting after a woman is just as much a sin as committing adultery. The thing that prevents actual adultery is opportunity. The desire for gratification with one with whom such is unlawful is the sin of lust. Lust includes not only the unlawful desire, but the will to satisfy that desire if opportunity were given.

This point of the gospel of the kingdom, like the one just discussed, goes beyond the overt action, the external sin, but deals with the heart of a person. It deals with the thought of the mind. In this the law of Christ is superior to the law of Moses. It is concerned more with the inward man than the old law while retaining concern for the outward man. The gospel proposes to check the first emotions of sin, and stifle the impulses that lead to sinful attitudes and deeds.

Looking upon a woman in admiration of feminine beauty is not what is condemned. Often the scripture notes the beauty of a fair woman. What is condemned is the sensual look, the intentional sensual excitement by use of the eye which creates unlawful desire.

There may well be that many men are evil in mind, lustful, and give in to the pursuit of sensual gratification of sexual desire. But there is no evil in the desire itself, nor the satisfaction of it in the bonds of marriage (Hebrews 13:4). But the fulfillment outside of marriage is abominable before God. There is no Christian manliness in that man who does not respect God's law regarding his behavior toward woman. Those in the kingdom strive to be pure in body and mind (First Timothy 5:2).

But we must remember that the exposure of the body is the natural and proper way of arousing interest and desire between the sexes. For this reason the Christian woman will be modest in her attire (First Timothy 2:9,10). A woman who is not discreet, but immodest in dress and manners, and indecently exposes her body to a man's view will likely create lust in his heart unless he keeps his heart under control. In her disrespect of her own body, and in disregard to God's Word, some man might be provoked to sin. But she shall also be condemned for her sin of immodesty. When a woman

wears abbreviated attire that overexposes her body she is a sinner before God.

Christian mothers and their daughters have a duty before God and man not to offend in this matter. Evil men may think you are attractive and desirable. But godly men, and the Lord, will think you cheap and sinful when you are not modestly dressed.

It is true that many fashions on the market today do not allow modesty by the wearer. Some have surrendered to the godless fashions and those who produce them without pain of conscience. Others, however, have returned to making their own garments rather than commit sin. God bless them!

While Jesus singles out the eye and the hand for possible destruction, He is not teaching mutilation of the body. The eye and hand are precious to us. But even that which is precious must be sacrificed if necessary in order not to sin. It is better to do without something precious than to be in hell.

The world does not look with favor on the teaching of Jesus Christ against a heart of lust or a heart of hatred. But those of the kingdom have respect for His Word. Such things as controlling the heart characterize those in the kingdom of Christ.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **We Have Our Work Before Us**

Even though this issue will come to you some months after I have typed this, let me tell you that I am presently in a motel room in Indianapolis, Indiana, soon to begin a gospel meeting at the Shelbyville Road church. It is a beautiful Sunday morning. But outside are many people going about their affairs, and obviously they are not dressed for any effort to worship God today in any way. They seem committed to the world and their own way. Who could doubt that we have much to do? I must go and invite at least one of them to go with me to worship. Who knows what they may think? JWB

## Lesson Seven - Matthew 5:31-42

The precepts of the Sermon on the Mount to now be considered dominate much of the study that people give to the sermon. Keeping in mind that the sermon is the doctrine of Christ, the gospel of the kingdom, the preamble of the new covenant, the forecast of the nature and characteristics of the kingdom that began on Pentecost, we turn our attention to see what the Lord said on the subject of marriage and divorce, making and taking oaths, and a notable difference between the law of Moses and the will of Christ in dealing with resistance and forbearance of evil.

*"It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement. But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery." (Matthew 5:31,32).* It is appropriate that we read other words of Jesus on this same subject in Matthew 19:3-9, *"The Pharisees also come unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He said unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery, and whoso marieth her which is put away doth commit adultery."*

### God's Intent

First, note that Christ reaffirms God's original intent regarding marriage. One man, one woman, no more twain, one flesh, no putting away is His will. That is the way God designed it. Romans seven teaches the only

honorable way for a marriage to be dissolved and that is the death of one of the partners. Anything else is going to involve sin. The only dissolution permitted at all, the only exception to the rule that marriage is for the rest of life, is in the event of conjugal, sexual infidelity. To defile the marriage bed is abominable against God and one's mate. Sexual union in marriage is honorable, but otherwise it is sin (Hebrews 13:4). God does not require a person to remain united with another who will not be faithful to the vow to "keep thyself only unto" him or her. Scripture does not reveal any other grounds for divorce.

Consider how this differs with so much that is allowed today. We must conclude that any divorce that is not because of fornication is not a divorce that God accepts. A so-called marriage union may be called marriage when one has been previously married but has divorced for other causes, but in God's eye it is not an acceptable marriage, but is adultery. It is nothing more than legalized adultery.

God never intended marriage to end in divorce. Moses allowed divorces and demanded they have legal recognition, but only for the protection of the parties involved. It was because the people were so stubborn against God's will. But such was never God's desire or design, and Jesus reaffirms God's law regarding the permanent nature of marriage. Marriage must be entered into with the same intent as God designed for it when He instituted it in the beginning.

Some say that one can never divorce and remarry under any circumstances. But to make that conclusion one must ignore the exception that Jesus Himself gave in both the fifth and nineteenth chapters.

### **Basic**

One can raise real and hypothetical cases where marital entanglements are tremendously complicated. But no man has the right to set aside these basic fundamentals of marriage and divorce as given in the doctrine of Christ. They are strict and inflexible. They are so much that way that the apostles recognized it and suggested it

was better to never marry. It may be better if one is not willing to abide by what the Lord has taught concerning marriage. Staying unmarried is not always the worst thing that can happen. But if one does marry, he and she must obey the Lord's will regarding it.

Instead of allowing people to grow up thinking this "try-it-a-while" attitude toward marriage is permissible, we need to teach that which the Lord has said. The lifetime union is what Christ teaches.

There is a deadly and sinister doctrine being taught that when one becomes a Christian, even though he has been living in adultery because he is not properly married, that at baptism his unlawful union somehow becomes lawful. When one becomes a Christian his past sins are forgiven, even adultery. But nothing in Scripture suggests that baptism makes an adulterous relationship a sanctified marriage. To so teach and advise is to mislead and will cost the souls of those who are misled as well as the false teacher. To be cleansed of sin, only to return to sin, means to be lost in sin.

Every marital problem will have its peculiarities. But no solution can be accepted that does not honor the fundamentals given in the Sermon on the Mount.

### **Regarding Oaths**

The next point Jesus discusses is oaths. *"Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not foreswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths. But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black, but let your communication be, Yea, yea, Nay, nay, for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil."* (Matthew 5:33-37).

The text implies that some were avoiding the performance of that which they promised to do. Some were taking oaths made on something they considered less than the name of the Lord, and did not feel

compelled to keep their word. An oath in the name of God was binding to them, but an oath on the temple, heaven, earth, or themselves could be broken if it was convenient to do so. Jesus is teaching that one should keep his word in every case, and not make exceptions such as were obviously being made.

There are several ways one can sin with the tongue, such as lying, profanity, gossiping, tale bearing, perjury, cursing, vulgarity, irreverence, taking God's name in vain, and other ways. Making an insincere promise or vow is also a way to sin. Jesus said your "yes" and your "no" ought be sufficient, adequate, and reliable. People get into trouble by saying things they do not mean, or feeling compelled to underscore their words by pronouncing some oath, profanity, or something like that. James warns, *"But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath, but let your yea be yea and your nay be nay, lest ye fall into condemnation."* (James 5:12). Such ought not be necessary for those of the kingdom. They ought to be people of truth and able to convey their thoughts without making oaths.

But there is another matter than must be discussed here. What is the Christian to do about legal oaths, such as in civil courts, or on various documents that require a statement of swearing or affirming something to be true? Is there any difference between affirming and swearing that something is true? There is no real difference. If one is wrong, both are wrong. We are asked to make such oaths of affirmations on death certificates, insurance papers, social security documents, tax forms, in court testimony, etc. You are to assure that you are telling the truth.

### **Already Promised**

For the Christian to promise to tell the truth is asking nothing of him that he has not already promised the Lord long ago. It is but a tool of the civil power to enforce the law and punish perjury and lying. But what did Jesus do when faced with that circumstance?

When Jesus was before the high priest, the priest demanded, "*I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.*" (Matthew 26:63). Jesus responded to that demand by acknowledging that He was the Christ. The word "*adjure*" means to answer under penalty. It is the same as promising to tell the whole truth, nothing but the truth, as one is required to do when called into court for some reason to testify. So we do no wrong to obey the law of the land in this case and swear to tell the truth under those circumstances.

Neither must it be wrong to call on God to be witness to what you say. Paul did this on several occasions (Romans 1:9; Second Corinthians 1:23; Galatians 1:20). He did not do this flippantly, with profanity, but with utmost reverence for God.

The teaching has to do with one's fidelity, honesty, and integrity. A man's word ought be his bond. Those in the kingdom are to be people who do not take a light and frivolous attitude toward the truth. Their word can be trusted by those who hear it.

### **Regarding Revenge**

*"Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away."* (Matthew 5:38-42).

These words outline a set of principles that govern those in the kingdom, that kingdom to which all men must belong if they are going to heaven. They present a viewpoint and a spirit that is to be possessed and exercised toward God and man.

Moses' law called for the "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" kind of response. The one who injures is injured in return. It was the principle of equal revenge and



retribution for evil. It was literally carried out and executed by the powers that ruled. The individual was not left to carry out the law under his own vengeance, but it was done according to the law.

But under the law of Christ there is a variation noted. There are times we must not resist, but forbear. The Lord is not teaching us to just be a door mat for everyone that wishes to step on us and offend us. The Lord Himself often used strong words and actions of resistance against evil, such as driving the money changers out of the temple, and looking with anger upon those who were rebellious. He is not teaching an unqualified and unlimited non-resistance.

The idea is to acquiesce when you can and comply passively against those that would take advantage of you. Forbearance is not always playing into the hands of the evildoers. We are not taught to never resist regardless of the circumstances that may be imposed upon us, such as an attack against our loved ones or our person. But there are matters in which it is better to forbear and let the other man have his way than to fight back. Turning the other cheek, going the second mile, giving more than is demanded of you, are terms that express the willingness of those in the kingdom to pursue peace and not retaliation. Vengeance belongs to God and God will take vengeance in time (Romans 12:19). It is not always necessary that we have our own way or that we are victorious over those that oppose us. In those matters where we can conform to the wishes of another, where God's will is not violated in doing so, the gospel of the kingdom teaches us to give in rather than resist, even the score, or get even with retribution as was formerly the case.

Jewish people were often physically abused by the Roman authorities. They were subjected to the demands of Roman soldiers to carry burdens. Rather than retaliate and seek vengeance, Christ was teaching that it is better to forbear and even do more than expected.

This is surely one of the hardest of the characteristics of the kingdom we find to obey. There seems to be within us a spirit to hit back when we are hit. There are times

when not providing protection is a neglect of duty. But there are times when we should not resist. We do not want to displace God and assume it is our right to settle all matters here on earth to our satisfaction.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Lesson Eight - Matthew 5:43-48**

As we continue a study of the gospel of the kingdom, the doctrine of Christ, this preview and forecast of the characteristics and nature of the kingdom that was to soon come, and did come on Pentecost, we reach the point where Jesus presents one of the most revolutionary concepts men have heard. It is not revolutionary in the sense that it is revolting and offensive like much that is called revolutionary today. But it is revolutionary in that it is a radical change from what people had formerly been taught and quite different from what many think today.

Actually, the next point of concern in the Sermon on the Mount is point number three in a series of three points that began with verse thirty-eight of chapter five. Jesus showed how the "eye for eye, tooth for tooth" concept was no longer proper. He also went a step further to insist that there are times and circumstances when we should not resist, but acquiesce and forbear before our enemies. Now He makes the third and very dramatic pronouncement regarding both an attitude and action toward enemies that we should have. It is this pronouncement that we shall study now, beginning with Matthew 5:43-48.

### **Regarding Enemies**

Before reading the text let us note that the teaching acknowledges the possibility, even the probability, that those in the kingdom would cultivate enemies along the way. We are not to be surprised at this (Matthew 10:34ff; Second Timothy 3:12). This fact of life may be why so much of the Sermon on the Mount dwells on the subject of persecution, enemies, hardship, and how to deal with

it. Jesus warned, *"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."* (John 15:18). *"Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you."* (First John 3:13). But what must be our heart and habit toward those who are enemies?

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

In the Old Testament, people were taught to love their neighbors (Leviticus 19:18), but another attitude existed toward enemies. *"Thou shalt not seek their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever."* (Deuteronomy 23:6). For fifteen or more centuries that course reflected somewhat the natural and immediate response toward one's friends and foes.

### **Love**

But under the gospel of the kingdom Jesus gives four specific attitudes and actions toward enemies that are quite at variance from the law of Moses. These four are found in verse forty-four. (1) Love your enemy. (2) Bless your enemy. (3) Do good unto your enemy. (4) Pray for your enemy. This is the kind of attitude and behavior that one is expected to offer toward loved ones and friends. But it is certainly out of the ordinary when such exists toward those who *"despitefully use you, and persecute you,"* take advantage of you, seek your hurt or injury in some way. This is the reason His teaching is so revolutionary.

To love another person is to seek that person's highest good. Christian love is not manifested to every person the same way because we sustain various relationships.

But Christian love always keeps the standard of seeking the other's highest good. The demonstration of Christian love is not always the easiest course to follow, nor the most popular one. It may not be the most peaceful one, or even the most pleasant. But it is always the right one.

Often the way of Christian love is showered with joy, gladness, warmth, comfort, and such similar qualities, but not always. Jesus would not have us to agree, compromise, surrender to error or evil in order to enjoy those benefits. But this does not change the fact that the gospel of the kingdom is love for all.

Love for one's enemy may take the form of sympathy, compassion, pity, or other forms like unto these. Consider the attitude of Jesus toward Pilate, Judas, Peter, who denied Him, and those who crucified Him. Did He not pray, "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do*"? On the other hand, love for one's enemy may take the form of rebuke, discipline, opposition to the sinfulness the enemy is committing. But in all circumstances and conditions, God wants us to love, even the enemy, that is, seek his highest good.

### **Bless**

Even though your enemy may seek your harm and injury, you are to bless your opponent, which is the very opposite of what he seeks for you. To be willing to bless another is the willingness to confer upon them whatever genuine benefit and prosperity you are capable of bestowing if the opportunity arises. We could never seek their prosperity in evil. But we would want them to enjoy prosperity in that which is good. To bless your enemy is another way of saying you seek their good, you manifest love, you have a willingness to assist them in attaining that good. Your afflictions caused by them will not be considered so great that you would withhold what they need if called upon to supply that need.

### **Do Good**

Christians do not seek revenge and are not retaliatory and vindictive. Rather they do good, not rendering evil for evil. "*Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but*

*rather give place unto wrath, for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good."* (Romans 12:19-21).

To love your enemy and bless him is certainly the right attitude toward him. But there is the need to go even further and do something to his benefit. There is the need for good action. People live by a variety of principles. For instance, some live by the principle of doing unto others as they do unto you. Others follow the rule of doing unto others before they do unto you. You find some who take advantage and exploit others, abusing others. Still some follow the doctrine of doing unto others the way they would like others to do toward them. The rule of the kingdom is to treat all men with love, seeking what is best for them as God defines the best. This goes for your adversary as well as your ally. We are to do good to others regardless of what they do toward us.

### **Pray**

The fourth part of this revolutionary doctrine presented by Jesus is that we pray for our enemies. To mention the name of your enemy in prayer requires love and good will. To talk with God on behalf of those who choose to be your opponents is to be impressed with the gospel of the kingdom. It is a marvelous thing how the doctrine of Christ, when and if applied, can accomplish such spiritual benefits for ourselves as well as for those around us. We are not likely to seek one's harm after we have asked God to help in seeking his good.

Jesus notes that such an attitude and action toward enemies is necessary to be a true child of God. Inasmuch as the children of God are the same ones who are citizens of the kingdom, we see this teaching describes an essential characteristic of the kingdom that was soon to be established. Children are generally expected to imitate their parents. *"If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham."* (John 8:39). A child of the devil will act like the devil (John 8:44). But a child of

God is expected to act like God wants him to act (John 8:47). Inasmuch as God has an unconditional love for all men, so should His children have such a love for all. God does not approve of all men, and neither should His children. God will not save all men and His children should not imply that He will. But God does seek all men to save all other men because He seeks man's highest good. So should it be with His children. As God sends the sun and rain on the evil and good, on the just and unjust, so we must love our foes as well as our friends.

Earlier in this sermon (Matthew 5:20), Jesus had said the righteousness those in the kingdom were to follow had to exceed that which others were following. The way of living had to be different and better. The system of righteousness that would characterize the kingdom would be superior to what others followed. To only love those who love us would not reflect a superior standard. Even those who are transgressors will do as much. To salute, greet, only our brethren is no mark of distinction because even those who are known to be unacceptable will do that. Those in the kingdom are courteous, gentlemanly, above board in their dealing with all men, even enemies as well as good brethren. This is because they follow the standard that exceeds.

### **Perfect**

The sum total of this portion of the sermon on attitudes and actions toward enemies points out the character of God, the nature of His kingdom, and how we, as citizens of it, are to be like Him. God is perfect, so must we be.

The word perfect has more than one meaning. God is perfect in every sense. It means sinless, faultless, flawless, no blemish whatever. This is beyond possibility for frail humanity. Even those in Christ are not absolutely sinless. *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us... If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."* (First John 1:8,10). But perfect also means completeness, maturity, having reached a high level of development. Man strives to be as sinless as he can. But he also reaches higher and higher degrees of maturity and spiritual development as he grows in Christ. This

matter of being perfect as God is perfect expresses the concept of spiritual growth that is to never discontinue as long as we live. As we live under the new and better covenant, we are to assimilate and appropriate to ourselves the spiritual qualities akin to God Himself. Peter calls it partaking of the divine nature (Second Peter 1:4).

A serious application of this profound yet simple precept of the doctrine of Christ will remove from our lives, our world, much of the strife, hatred, stress, tension, animosity, bitterness, and sin among people. It would make our existence on earth more pleasant. Talk about something relevant, applicable, usable, up-to-date, and needful for our generation! What is there that is more so than the Sermon on the Mount? Such is the gospel of the kingdom. To the extent we respect the Teacher, we will respect His teaching.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **How Come This “Campbellite” Stuff We Keep Hearing?**

Most brethren have been called “Campbellites” by denominational people at one time or another. They are led to do this by a prejudiced clergy who just abhor the simple plea to return to New Testament Christianity. They are so wrapped up in denominationalism, and their churches of human origin, they just can’t conceive of anybody not belonging to a denomination. They just won’t allow it. They would prohibit anybody from being just a Christian and a member of the church of which you read in the New Testament. Neither will they be honest with the historical facts regarding Alexander Campbell and the efforts

made by many to restore the church as the Bible reveals it. It is too much for them.

The fact is, efforts to return to the church of the Bible began before A. Campbell ever set foot on these shores. It began among Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and others without ever having heard of the man. Churches of Christ existed in England after Catholicism, and Protestant Reformation, a century or more before A. Campbell was born. How could such folks be called Campbellites with any degree of honesty? Dishonesty may be at the heart of the term "Campbellite."

Even in the county where I live there existed a church of Christ before A. Campbell was ever in America. Only a prejudiced clergymen, who shows his ignorance of history and the Bible, would ever say Campbell, or any man founded the church of Christ. Why don't some of these people show more honesty with truth, and admit the church exists separate and apart from denominationalism? Nothing we believe or do is believed or done by the authority of Campbell or any other human. We follow the authority of Christ (Colossians 3:17).

Unfortunately, some, even among brethren who have chosen liberalism over truth, have given away the plea to restore New Testament Christianity. They openly confess they have no interest in its restoration. Here is one of a number of places where we part company. I am interested in the church of the Bible because, of all the churches that exist on earth, that one is RIGHT. JWB





## **Lazarus Is Sick**

The record begins with Jesus beyond Jordan where John first baptized. Word came that Lazarus was sick in Bethany. He was the brother of Mary and Martha. "*Lord, behold, he who thou lovest is sick.*" But Jesus did not react as we probably would, going immediately to his side. Jesus knew this was an opportunity to glorify God and identify Himself as the Son of God. He remained where He was for two more days, then left for Judea. There may arise events in our lives that may at first not appear to be all that they can be. Even sad situations might be turned into something that would bring glory to God if only we would use them that way. We ought keep a sharp eye for opportunities. JWB

# *The Last Word*

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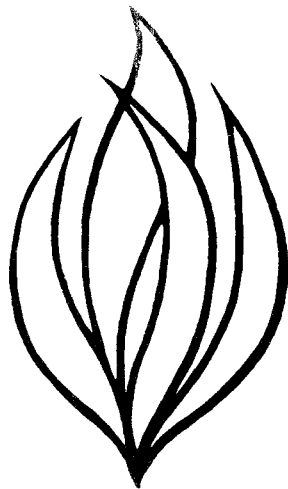
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**East End CHURCH OF CHRIST**  
102 Edison Street  
McMinnville, TN 37110

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**Permit No. 349**

# 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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# Sermon on the Mount

## Lesson Nine - Matthew 6:1-8; 16-18

Our study of this sermon takes us into chapter six of Matthew where Jesus discusses a subject that was often discussed during His personal ministry, and that is the subject of hypocrisy. Keep in mind that this sermon is the gospel of the kingdom, the doctrine of Christ, the preamble of the new covenant, a forecast and preview of the nature and characteristics of the kingdom that Jesus was soon to establish, and did, on Pentecost.

Thus far we have studied the eight Beatitudes, three Similitudes or comparisons of the kingdom, eight specific precepts of His doctrine. We studied the relationship of the doctrine of Christ to the Mosaic Law, also to human traditions, the sins of hate and lust, the taking of oaths, marriage and divorce, the quality of forbearance, and the right attitude and action toward our enemies. Chapter six opens with remarks regarding hypocrisy, especially as it is demonstrated through a religious exhibition and showiness.

### Warnings

*"Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore, when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily, I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth, that thine alms may be in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are, for they love to pray standing in the synagogue and in the corners of the streets that they may be seen of men. Verily, I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut the door, pray to thy Father*

*which is in secret, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do, for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them, for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him." (Matthew 6:1-8). "Moreover when ye fast, be not as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance, for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in heaven, and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly." (Matthew 6:16-18).*

By these words Jesus condemns a religion of unnecessary show and display of self. Citizens of the kingdom are not exhibitionists and do not parade their religion before others in order to win the praise and plaudits of men. Christianity does manifest itself. We have already learned that Jesus said, *"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 5:16). But there is a difference between letting your light shine, and just shining your light. Christianity is not showy, pretentious, ostentatious, designed to be a way of seeking acclaim, attracting attention, and receiving the admiration of others for oneself. It is one thing to do what you ought because it is right and allow whatever natural consequences of that deed take place that may cause others to glorify God. But it is quite another thing to do something, even what you ought to do, in such a way to be seen of others in order that others will be impressed with your goodness, piety, and praise you for it. Christianity does not appeal through the spectacular, sensational, festive, public display. It does not make its appeal through the eye, ear, or physical sense in a manner that is showy and pretentious. Unhappily, much promotion in religion today has been reduced to entertainment, showmanship, and even carnival-like atmospheres. Men use everything, all kinds of gimmicks and attractions to draw a crowd, entertaining rather than edifying. But such produces praises of men and publicity for men rather than glory for God.

The very nature of Christianity is such that discourages advertising of our deeds in order to stimulate public applause for ourselves. The appeal of the gospel is not reflected by circus-like environment, big names of the world to attract crowds, horn-blowing and the many gadgets and ploys being used, in and out of the church, to attract.

### **Motive**

As has been seen to be true in many of the precepts of the gospel of the kingdom, the motive behind the deed is no more and no less important than the deed itself. We must take care that we do not do that which is wrong. But even when we do that which is right, we must guard our motives for so doing. It takes the right motive behind the right deed to be right with God. Either a wrong motive or a wrong deed is a displeasure to God.

There are four ways to do wrong, and one way to do right. (1) Doing a wrong deed with the wrong motive. (2) Doing the wrong deed with the right motive. (3) Doing the right deed with the wrong motive. (4) Doing nothing for fear of doing something wrong. The way to please God is to do the right thing with the right motive.

### **Alms-giving**

Jesus cited three specific illustrations of the point He made. First, in alms-giving. To give gifts was a commendable activity. Charity is something the Lord approves. The showy manner of the charitable acts is what Jesus condemned, and the evil motive made it repulsive. When men do what they do to receive glory of men, they may well be praised by their fellows. Many people are sufficiently shallow to be impressed. But that is the sum total of their reward. There is no heavenly reward.

But to give alms, gifts, charity, in an inconspicuous manner, from a motive and desire to do good, though it may not cause you to be praised by men (they may never even know of it), God takes note of it. He knows your attitude of heart and He will be pleased with both your attitude and action.

The phrase, "*Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth,*" is a figure of speech that has its application in doing your righteousness without the search for praise from others. Hypocrisy in alms-giving is obvious when giving appears to be for good and charitable works, but it actually becomes a means of receiving congratulations from others. Such an attitude and action is not that which is to characterize those in the kingdom. Some might never do anything of a charitable nature if they knew nobody would ever know it except God. Possibly this was the sin of Annanias and Saphirra who said they had given so much when actually they had held back a portion. Possibly they did what they did and lied about it because they wanted others to think they were more charitable than they really were.

### **Prayer**

A second illustration had to do with the manner of praying. Jesus is not condemning the posture of standing when one prays. Nor is He condemning public prayer. It does not mean one must literally go into a closet and shut the door before he can pray. We read of prayers being offered in many situations in the Bible that had God's approval. The spirit of His words is to be applied. Prayer can be properly and improperly made anywhere. What He is condemning is the showiness of prayer.

Prayer is a noble, beneficial, spiritual activity. God has blessed people with the opportunity for prayer. Certainly the Lord is not condemning prayer or praying together. This must be considered in the context of His teaching against hypocrisy and public display of religion. Later in this Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches His disciples how to pray. The Lord does not approve of people going about their practice of prayer in such a fashion that simply attracts attention to themselves that others may observe and offer praise to the praying people for their devotion and piety.

To pray just so others may see you pray, to pray with words that are designed to impress men rather than make a humble thanks and supplication to God, is to commit the hypocrisy of which Jesus speaks. Some have their "prayer voice," this overly pious and unnatural



tone when they pray. Some use such flowing, glowing, flowery speech that one is more attracted by the verbiage than the sentiments expressed. While we are content to let God judge the hearts of others, we should be careful not to pray in such fashion that smacks of a display of our righteousness. Being genuine is a quality that must exist in prayer. When one prays like that which Jesus condemns, something sacred is turned into something profane. A divine privilege is subverted into an exercise of self-glory. To demonstrate this outward righteousness does not reflect submission nor humility that is mandatory in acceptable prayer.

Christ cited the heathen practice of "*vain repetitions*" as another mark of hypocrisy in prayer. Such produces nothing, but only draws attention to oneself. Sincere repetition is not condemned. But the constant repeating of phrases, thinking that the mere repetition of them has some benefit, is just so much mechanical verbosity. Oratory, proceeding through ritual and liturgy is not a display of true piety, but of an imitation of heathen practices. We must guard against playing to the audience rather than praying to God.

The vanity of such repetition is underlined by the realization that God knows that for which we have need even before we ask. Prayer is not for the purpose of informing God of our need. He already knows that. It is to ask God to supply that need. It is a recognition of our dependence on God, and an opportunity to show gratitude toward God for His providence.

Prayer, like other avenues of worship, is a highly personal matter. It is between man and God, the individual and God. Even when others may direct our thoughts in prayer, the use of the avenue of prayer is between you and God, me and God, each one and God. This avenue ought never be a man-man activity where one man makes a religious display for another man.

This teaching regarding the abuse of prayer is followed with the teaching of Jesus on how to pray which we defer to our study until the next lesson. In verses 16-18 Jesus gave one other illustration of His teaching against hypocritical and showy religious practices that is in

order for us to consider now. We shall return to the teaching on prayer in our next lesson.

### **Fasting**

The third illustration He uses has to do with fasting. Whereas the first two illustrations involved a continual activity required by the law of Moses, that of almsgiving and prayer, fasting has scarce mention in the ceremonial observances of the Old Testament. It has no doctrinal directions in the New Testament in the sense of a command or requirement. Fasting had gradually become attached to the Jewish traditions. It has been exercised in past ages, as well as now, in times of mourning, sorrow, calamity, stress, and meditation. To fast as a Christian ritual is without authority and is as out of place as foot washing as a ritual. Nonetheless, at the time Jesus was teaching, fasting had become a sign of one's religious fervor and devotion.

Hypocrites pretended to fast so as to appear religious. It was all show. They would look sad, make up their faces to appear hungry, when they were not doing anything with sincerity, but with a desire to show off. They put on this form to impress others. It reminds one of the human tradition of Lent, Ash Wednesday, and similar things where people put ashes on their faces, and fast, and do other such things of outward display that has no Biblical authority behind it.

Christ admonished, even when you fast, do your best to look your best. Nothing, even of a traditional nature that suggests piety, is to be corrupted into a display of oneself for self-praise. God knows the heart, God knows the deed, God will reward as He sees fit, and that ought to be enough for us because that is all that matters.

To summarize this teaching we might add, if a man is truly and sincerely pious, devoted, consecrated, he cannot help but be a city as set on a hill. But if he has to parade his words, deeds, dress, manners, etc. to show others he is righteousness, that is an indication that he is not near so righteous as he thinks, nor righteous as he ought to be.

There are few subjects where Jesus used stronger words of condemnation than when He was discussing hypocrisy of the Pharisees in Matthew twenty-three. This hypocrisy was the "leaven" against which he warned others. "*Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees...*" Their doctrines and behavior was not to be imitated. Honesty, sincerity, righteous deeds motivated from a good and honest heart is what the Lord expects of those who will compose His kingdom.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Lesson Ten - Matthew 6:9-15**

In chapter six of Matthew, in the midst of teaching that condemns hypocrisy of a show-off kind of religion, Jesus teaches on the subject of prayer. Matthew 6: 9-13, "*After this manner therefore pray ye. Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.*"

The context of this teaching is very important to a full understanding of it. While condemning a religion that exhibits itself for the praise of men and receiving their plaudits, He shows that right actions are also important as right motives. Get the significance if we will. The teaching of Jesus Christ is such that those who serve Him faithfully in His kingdom must do so with both the heart and deed, attitude and action.

Matthew 6:6 has already emphasized the very personal nature of prayer. It is a matter between man and God. It is a sacred relationship that deserves every consideration and reverence. The very subject of prayer must be considered with a reverent frame of mind.

### **What This Prayer Is Not**

These words of Jesus are not to be used as some sort of liturgical, ritualistic form of prayer. They are not like a "paternoster" (a word formula repeated over and over again as if there is some magical charm or power in the mere repetition of them like the Romanist practice). Neither is this the "Lord's Prayer" as if Jesus was praying this prayer on this occasion. He is teaching how to pray, not praying. On another occasion (Luke 11) Jesus used many of the same terms found here in responding to the disciples' request, "*Lord, teach us to pray.*" But let us remember that the very fact He taught prayer shows that prayer is by His authority.

An analysis of the teaching reveals it falls into three parts. (1) Words of praise of God. (2) Petitions unto God. (3) Recognition of God as the source of all blessings. The prayer contains nine phrases which we wish to consider briefly.

### ***"Our Father Which Art In Heaven"***

Is it not obvious from this address that prayer is an activity by those who are children of God? Prayer is a privilege of the Christian. God has given this opportunity to those who are His spiritual children. Those who are still the children of the devil do not address God in this fashion as "*Father.*" God is not yet their spiritual Father. Actually, there is no way for those apart from God to address God. One must come to God through Christ before he has the privilege of prayer and the promise to be heard.

Under the law of the kingdom one is not a child of God by virtue of his ancestry or because he is of the fleshly stock of Abraham. We become children of God by having been cleansed by the blood of Christ when we obey His command to be baptized. The offer for man to be a spiritual child of God is made both to Jew and Gentile alike and on the same terms and conditions. "*Whosoever will may come.*" Galatians 3:28,29, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye Christ's, the are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise*" It is the Christian that is blessed with the avenue of prayer.

The God to whom we direct our prayers is the God which is in heaven, Jehovah, as revealed in Scripture.

### ***"Hallowed Be Thy Name"***

This is an express of adoration. It is simple, yet sincere in praise of the Lord, His glory, and His name. It is an admiration of Him. Prayer should include words of praise to and of God. Those in the kingdom are worshippers of God. *"But the hour cometh and now is when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."* (John 4:23,24).

### ***"Thy Kingdom Come"***

Those who are the disciples of Christ would make up the citizenry of His kingdom. We must remember that at the time this sermon was preached the kingdom had not yet come. It was still in the future. It was later established on the first Pentecost after the Lord's ascension into heaven. It was the mission of Christ to build that kingdom that would be composed of the saved, which is the church. Here He was teaching His disciples that it was then proper to pray that the kingdom would come. Today the kingdom has long ago come. We would not properly pray these same words with the same meaning as originally given by Christ because the kingdom now exists. Then it did not. Those who teach the kingdom has not yet come encounter multiple contradictions of their position from Scripture. It is entirely proper that we pray for the spread of the borders of the kingdom, and that the kingdom might come into areas and among people who have not yet come to the Lord. But that was not the significance of the phrase when Christ was teaching His disciples how to pray.

### ***"Thy Will Be Done"***

This is an expression of subjection and submission that must characterize those who are in God's kingdom. It is the attitude that we always want God's will to be done in our lives, and even throughout this earth, just as His will prevails in heaven. It is the will of God that takes

center stage here. Citizens of His kingdom do not submit to their own will, the will of men, or to the will of Satan, but to the will of God.

### ***"Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread"***

What a wonderful recognition of God as the source of our physical blessings as well as our spiritual provisions. Later in this sermon, in this same chapter, Jesus teaches the providence of God. Here He shows the propriety of asking God for such physical provisions. We do not pray in this way to inform God what we need as if He was unaware of our needs. But we show our realization of dependence on Him and our respect for Him as our Provider.

Notice again that for which we are to pray. (1) Pray for daily provision, not abundance for all time. (2) Pray for bread, that which is necessary for life, not for luxuries, indulgences, etc. James 4:3 advises, *"Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."*

### ***"Forgive Us our Debts..."***

This is a call for mercy. We do not deserve forgiveness. For those not in Christ, the way to receive mercy is to obey the gospel and come to Christ's blood. But for those who are already children of God, we have the privilege of prayer and can ask God for His merciful forgiveness. We are in the body where His blood flows to keep the faithful clean (First John 1:7). Luke says, *"Forgive us our sins."* When we sin we place ourselves under obligation to God and those against whom we have sinned. Sin is not truly forgiven until forgiven by the Lord. *"Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."* (Romans 4:8).

Forgiveness of sins is conditional. Christ provided the way of forgiveness by His death on the cross. But man must come that way to be forgiven. Even this prayer is not to be understood that God forgives if we refuse to obey the conditions of forgiveness that He has revealed. One condition for forgiveness is stressed immediately following His teaching here about prayer. That condition is that we ourselves are forgiving. *"For if ye forgive men*

*their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matthew 6:14,15).*

The request for forgiveness is an open acknowledgment of one's need of forgiveness. Something basic to being forgiven is to accept the fact that forgiveness is needed. All have sinned (Roman 3:23), but some seem to act and talk as if that did not apply to them. Until one accepts this fact regarding himself, he will not be penitent, nor desire forgiveness, nor have any inclination to be obedient to the terms of forgiveness.

### ***“Lead Us Not Into Temptation”***

We should not mistake the power of temptation. *“Let not 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 lusts and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death.”* (James 1:13-15). We should pray for the guidance of the Lord, but not expect some kind of direct intervention which He has not promised. His guidance is in His Word (Psalm 119:105), *“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path,”* and we should pray that His Word would have free course in our thinking and actions. As we follow His Word we are following His will and will be led aright.

Even so, even in the kingdom, we cannot forget that our adversary, the devil, walks about as a roaring lion seeking to devour (First Peter 5:8). Satan will use any and every means to appeal to the Christian to sin and fall away. The three basic avenues of his approach are the ones he used against Eve, and also against Christ in the wilderness. John mentions them in First John 2:16 as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. Our prayer should be that through the providence of God and our following His Word that we shall not be subjected to temptation, but delivered from it. We must try to avoid temptation whenever possible. We cannot be very sincere in this part of prayer if, while we are asking that we not be led into temptation, we are going and doing in such a fashion that places temptations before

us constantly and needlessly. Christians in the kingdom do not seek, but wish to avoid, opportunities to sin.

### ***"Deliver Us From Evil"***

This is a very logical follow-up statement to *"lead us not into temptation."* The Lord knew that we cannot escape every temptation. We live in this world where temptation and sin is all around us. Satan, the prince of this world, abounds. While we are to avoid temptation all we can, we are aware that all temptation cannot be avoided. At such times we must, as James instructs, *"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."* (James 4:7). Our prayer should be that when we are tempted and tried, we will not submit to the temptation and sin. It is not sin to be tempted. Christ was tempted, but did no sin (First Peter 2:22; Hebrews 4:15). We can withstand the temptation to sin. *"There hath no temptation taken you but 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). We cannot trifle with temptation and sin, seeing that the *"wages of sin is death"* (Romans 6:23).

### ***"For Thine Is The ..."***

In this final phrase we return to the words of praise. In it we have the mission and purpose of prayer. It is to glorify God. *"For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen."* Prayer ascribes to God the homage due Him. Our manner of prayer, while not necessarily expressed in the exact words of the Lord's lesson on prayer, is certainly to be with the same intent and sentiment, patterned after this teaching. We should include the three major and basic elements of prayer: namely, praise, petition, and recognition of God as our Provider of blessings. This certainly does not exhaust the Biblical teaching regarding prayer, or even the example given here. But it suffices as we move to another matter of doctrine in this gospel of the kingdom.

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## Lesson Eleven - Matthew 6: 19-34

*"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal; But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt and where thieves do not break through nor steal; For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye; if therefore thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness. No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."* (Matthew 6: 19-24).

Three main points are discussed in this passage that serve somewhat as a launching pad from which we go into a consideration of the providence of God. (1) Laying up treasures; (2) keeping the eye single; (3) and the impossibility of serving two masters. These three points deal with a major conflict of man as he strives to serve God in a material world.

The Christian's emphasis must be on matters of eternal nature, of spirit import, and earthly and temporal matters must be secondary. *"Set your affection on things above, not on things on earth."* (Colossians 3:2). If the heart is on this world it will not be on God. Our treasures should be of the imperishable, spiritual sort.

Christ uses the eye to illustrate a fundamental truth. The eye is the organ of light for the entire body. If the eye is diseased, blurred, or double-visioned rather than a single image that is clear, precise, and distinct, the body will not be enlightened. So it is with the eye of the heart, the eye of understanding (Ephesians 1:18; James 1:8). Just as the physical eye must be single and clear, so the eye of the heart (mind, ability to comprehend) must be clear and set on one object of prime loyalty, or else we will be in spiritual darkness. We cannot serve two masters. Our master will either be the Lord or mammon, which refers to the material things of this world and this life. Attempts to live for this world, putting the

matters of this world (however important) before God, is to suffer spiritual double vision and darkness. Such is not to characterize the kingdom's citizens.

These words lead us in the Lord's discussion regarding man's anxiety about material things. There are certain material matters that are necessary for life, and we are expected to be good stewards of material matters placed in our care. Yet, such things must be kept in their place lest they become hindrances to our spiritual welfare.

### **He Does Not Condemn Material Things**

Jesus is not saying that material things are themselves evil. Nor is he saying that we can be indifferent regarding our responsibilities concerning material matters. He is not condemning ownership, even though it is at best our stewardship. He does not place a premium on indigence, poverty, and a lack of prudence regarding material matters. If He was doing that He would be contradicting teaching concerning the proper use of material things and our responsibility regarding them (Second Corinthians 12:14; Matthew 15: 3-6; 25:14-30; First Timothy 5:4,5; Second Thessalonians 3:10). This He did not do.

He is using the figure of speech where the less important is totally denied in order to emphasize the more important. He taught in similar fashion in John 6:27, "*Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life...*" Jesus does not here forbid working for a living for yourself and those dependent on you. He is not forbidding making adequate provision for temporal needs. He is simply showing where the emphasis must be when one follows Him. We are expected to be more considerate of things permanent than things transient.

If the eye of the heart, the mind, is clear and precise, we will know that we cannot serve God and mammon at the same time. One or the other must take pre-eminence. The truth we must learn is that God comes first.

### ***"Take No Thought For..."***

In another figure of speech, Jesus stresses the greater by denying the lesser. *"Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?"* (Matthew 6:25). Jesus is not prohibiting all thought and attention to material matters, for some of that is essential in living. The American Standard Version read, *"Be not anxious..."* over such things. We now are really getting into the discussion of the providence of God. While certain material things are vital, Jesus is teaching that God will provide. It is not that man may sit down idle and expect God to do everything for him. God expects man to cooperate and use that which God has already given him. But God promises provisions when certain conditions are met.

Jesus is not forbidding giving "forethought," in the sense of planning, but He is forbidding "foreboding," in the sense of anticipation and worry. We do not suggest that this is an easy teaching to obey when the trials and pressures of the material world build up against us. We are saying that Jesus says, "Do not worry over material matters." His words give peace of mind to those in the kingdom in a world of uncertainty. They are designed to direct our attention to matters of greater significance and consequence. After all, God will provide.

### **A Reasonable Appeal**

Christ makes the most reasonable appeal one can imagine to show the uselessness and futility of worrying and being anxious over such matters. For the sake of space, we urge the reader to take his Bible and read just here Matthew 6:26-32. This reading is vital to our study.

### **The Fowls**

*"Behold the fowls..."* Here is an illustration of God's natural provisions. *"He feedeth them."* *"Are ye not better than they?"* Certainly, we are, because man has been created in the spiritual image of God. No fowl, nor any other of God's creations are so designated except mankind. If God is not unconcerned about such creatures, He will not be unconcerned for us and our

earthly existence. Being anxious will not add to our provision.

### **The Lilies and the Grass**

*"Consider the lilies... the grass of the field..."* He clothes them. Shall He not clothe us? Lilies, grass are here today, gone tomorrow. Man is of greater nature than such things. Then the Lord adds, *"O ye of little faith."* To forebode, worry, be anxious, overly concerned about material matters and provision is a manifestation of a lack of faith in the providence of God. Gentiles were engrossed in the mundane, earthly matters to the neglect of the soul and eternity. But those in the kingdom are to possess a different view of life and the matters of earth.

### **God Already Knows**

The futility of worry and anxiety is seen in the fact that God knows what we need in material matters (verse 32). Referring back to previous studies (Chapter six, verse eight), God knows what things we need before we ask. We do not pray to inform God of our needs so much as to give recognition to God that we realize He is the One who supplies our needs. God provides. And the God who provides says such things are not of first priority.

### **What Is To Be First?**

*"But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow, for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."* (Matthew 6:33,34). The kingdom of God refers to the church. Everything related to the church deserves and demands our first concern, including its work, worship, mission, existence, etc. God's righteousness means God's plan for making man righteous, or the justification of man. It is the plan of salvation, the scheme of redemption, the system of salvation, the way that our sins are forgiven. In other words, the church and God's way of saving man must take first place in the lives, affairs, actions, ambitions of those in the Lord's kingdom. Even such

necessary matters as the material needs of life cannot be first. God must be first.

### **What About Today and Tomorrow?**

We are not to worry about tomorrow. We need to live today as best we can. The things that may come tomorrow cannot be handled now. Each day has all that we can properly handle. We cannot live yesterday over, and we cannot skip into tomorrow. The cares, needs, problems, challenges, of today are all that we need to care for now because that is all that we can do right now. As each day dawns, as each tomorrow becomes today, God will provide. *"I have been young, and now I am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."* (Psalm 37:25). *"Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me. Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain."* (Proverbs 30: 8,9).

We are not able to tell what a day may bring forth (James 4:13-15). For those in the kingdom there may be some days that are dark, difficult, and dismal, as well as days that are bright, joyful, and full of success. Such has been the case of God's people throughout human history. But each day brings its own challenges, blessings, and problems. We are not to borrow trouble from yesterday nor from tomorrow. With each day bringing its own responsibilities, we are not able to shoulder more than one day at a time. We will become overburdened and break under the strain if we try.

Because of God's providence, there will be sufficient provision as God, in His infinite wisdom, sees we stand in need. The final chapter also includes words about God's ability to provide for us which we shall consider when we get to that point in this gospel of the kingdom, this preamble of the new covenant, this doctrine of Christ, that which points toward the coming of the kingdom which did come on the first Pentecost after the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Lesson Twelve - Matthew 7:1-5**

We now begin a study of the third of the three chapters that are devoted to the sermon preached by Christ on some unidentified mount. It is an appropriate time to review some of the basic fundamentals in understanding this sermon because the reader is not likely to read this entire series at one sitting.

It was preached by Christ at the beginning of His personal ministry. The context of the sermon is the message of John the Baptist that Jesus is the "*Lamb of God.*" (John 1:29). It is in the context of Jesus' preaching the need to repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matthew 4:17). He came preaching the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:4). It is the doctrine of Christ (Matthew 7:28,29). It serves as the preamble of the new covenant, a preview and forecast of the nature and character of the kingdom He would establish, and did establish, on Pentecost.

At this point Jesus had presented eight Beattitudes, three Similitudes, eight principle precepts of distinction of His gospel, plus condemnation of hypocrisy, a lesson on prayer, a discussion of the providence of God, and the necessity of putting first things first. We next encounter the essentiality of following the right standard and authority, as opposed to following men or self.

### **Regarding Judging**

*"Judge not that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then thou shalt see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye."* (Matthew 7:1-5).

Few passages have been more misunderstood and misapplied than the one under consideration. People have taken the words of Jesus and twisted them, wrested

them, turned them around, and used them against some of the very commandments that Jesus gave.

Sometimes we can better understand a thing by first seeing what it does not mean. Let us consider some ideas that this passage cannot mean except we have blatant contradictions in the Word of God. In this way we may be able to clear away some of the debris of error men have taught about this passage.

Jesus is not saying, "Pass no judgments whatever on anything or anybody." There are several irrefutable evidences that He is not teaching the total prohibition of all judgments. He said Himself, "*Judge righteous judgment.*" (John 7:24). Obviously, there is a way to judge unrighteously, but there is a way to judge righteously. Righteous judgment is contrasted with unrighteous judgment. In John seven, what had appeared to the Pharisees to be a violation of the law of Moses was not a violation at all. Healing a man on the Sabbath Day was not sinful. Actually, it was very compatible with the law of Moses for it provided for relieving either man or animal which was in dire circumstances, whether on the Sabbath or any other time. They had made an unrighteous judgment. But some judgment is not only allowed, but required in serving God. Therefore, Jesus is not prohibiting making judgments altogether. But the standard must be right and the understanding of the standard must be clear.

### **Necessary Judgments**

We have to know the difference between right and wrong. How else can we "*discern both good and evil*" (Hebrews 5:14)? The most frustrated, confused, easily misled people on earth are those who do not know how to distinguish between right and wrong. They have no knowledge of the standard by which to measure. Young people, left to "decide for themselves," who have never been taught God's standard by which to make decisions, often find themselves not knowing what to do or which way to turn. It is indispensable in discerning good from evil that we make judgments. Decisions are judgments.

Elderships cannot fulfill their divinely given task if all judgments were prohibited. To take heed to themselves and to others requires making judgments (Acts 20:28). Keeping the flock free from error demands making judgments. Sometimes judgments have to be made regarding teaching, people, character, reputation, abilities, etc. Certainly the Lord did not assign them a duty and then make it sinful for them to discharge that duty. So we know all judgments are not forbidden.

Elders or bishops must "*convince the gainsayer.*" (Titus 1:9). A gainsayer is one who acts or speaks against truth. There must be a recognition of error and then efforts made to convert the one who holds it. This demands judgments. How foolish for someone to teach error and the eldership discharges its duty by opposing that error and the one in error cries, "Don't judge me!!" They must judge him. They must condemn the error he espouses. Anything less would be to shirk their duty.

The passage does not prohibit condemnation, publicly or privately, of sin. False teachers, especially among liberal brethren, misuse the Sermon on the Mount in an attempt to silence anyone who would oppose their sins and false doctrines. They accuse one of "judging" if one opposes what is wrong. Certainly it is judging. But it is judging righteously, and it must be done. Jesus did not teach against sin and error, and then prohibit the opposition to sin and error. We cannot fight the good fight of faith with only positive teaching. There must be negative teaching as well. The armor of the Lord provide for the defense of the truth and an offense against error. We are to pull down strongholds, cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God (Second Corinthians 10:5). The sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:17) is the Word of God, and it is a sharp two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). It cuts forward and backward, defensively and offensively, for the truth and against the wrong.

How else could Timothy reprove, rebuke, and exhort if he never made any judgments (Second Timothy 4:2)? But it is not uncommon in our day of permissiveness, compromise, and digression to hear some say, "Don't condemn because the Bible says not to judge." The one



who so complains has just made a judgment and condemned those who he says judged him. How inconsistent can a thing be? Such a misunderstanding and misuse of truth totally misses the mark. The passage is not to be abused to as to provide a haven for false doctrines and sinful practices.

First Corinthians 6:2 teaches that the saints are to judge the world. This is done by preaching the gospel, practicing the truth, upholding the right, and condemning the wrong. Like Noah, who condemned the world (Hebrews 11:7), so must people of God today make judgments and warn the sinner of the error of his way.

Jesus said, later in this sermon, "*Ye shall know them by their fruits.*" (Matthew 7:16,20). "*Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*" This makes making judgments necessary and indispensable.

We might add that Jesus is not giving man a way to escape being judged. It has been wrongfully asserted that if we will never judge, then we will not ever be judged. That is not so. "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*" (Second Corinthians 5:10). God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world by Christ (Acts 17:31). We shall not escape the judgment.

### **What It Means**

To say what a passage does not mean is not yet to say what it does mean. First, Jesus calls for judgment to be made according to the same standard for all. Verse two emphasizes that the same standard is to be used. There is not one standard for me, another for you, a third for your neighbor, a fourth for the fourth man, etc. There is not one for my family and another for yours. There is not one for elders, preachers, and deacons, and another for members. Romans 2:1-3, "*Therefore thou are inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself, for thou that judgest doest the same things. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against*

*them which commit such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?"*

All have sinned, even though not necessarily and precisely the same way, but all are guilty of sin nonetheless (Romans 3:23). Sin is sin. The same standards ought to be applied to all. Salvation is the same for us all. Judgment ought be made on the same basis also. What is wrong for one is wrong for another in the same situation and position. We have different duties and positions, yes, but the same standard is to be applied where it is applicable. Favoritism and partiality in applying the measure is a fault that men are guilty of committing.

### **Use God's Rule**

Not only must we abide by the same rule, but it must be the correct rule. We are to judge by God's standard. We have no right to judge by our own standards. When we make judgments, it must be that we are not making them on the basis of our own authority, but we must recognize the authority of God and recognize the judgments He has already made and revealed in His Word. Any other measure will have the inherent deficiency of human wisdom altogether.

Judgment is not to be made by comparing ourselves with ourselves (Second Corinthians 10:12). We might do this and come up looking fairly good, but the standard is faulty. Even though we may appear to pass the test, the test itself will not pass.

We must not be hasty and make judgments on superficial appearance. "*Judge not according to appearance.*" (John 7:24). Things are not always what they at first appear to be on the surface. We are not to try to judge the heart of another because we are incapable of doing this. This is a capacity that belongs exclusively to Deity. "*Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart.*" (First Samuel 16:7). This is the judgment that is forbidden. We cannot judge motives, intents, and the heart of others unless they have revealed it to us.

Certainly we cannot make judgments based on the law of Moses because that which was once the standard for the Jews is no longer a standard for anybody. It has been taken out of the way, being nailed to the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:14).

Too many simply let their consciences be their guide, but this is a faulty standard because consciences are trained, and if and when they are trained incorrectly they will produce an incorrect decision for us. Consciences are to be followed, and it is sinful to violate the conscience (Romans 14:23). Even so, the conscience must be trained according to the will of God for it to be reliable. Paul, while Saul of Tarsus, once persecuted and made havoc of the church with all good conscience (Acts 23:1; 24:16). But who could contend his conscience was a right standard of measure in that situation?

All matters must be judged according to the all-sufficient scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Unless something measures happily with the Word of God we must leave it of, leave it out, leave it, period . It is deserving of condemnation.

### **Respect the Limits**

We must learn our limits. While we must make certain judgments, we are not to pass sentence on anyone. That belongs to God. There is a difference between determining God's will about right from wrong and then assuming the right, authority, and power to sentence another. We have no more right to pass sentence than we have to set up our own standards. However, we must respect and proclaim what sentence God has said will be passed. When we tell others what God says, we are making no judgments of our own. When God says stealing is sinful, and thieves shall go to hell unless they repent, we make no evil judgment nor do we pass sentence on others on our own authority and power. Sometimes we hear preachers pass sentence on others at funerals on people who were apparently good people, and they preach them right into heaven. We have no such right. We can have hope and expectation for one's soul because he was a faithful Christian because God extends that hope. But to presume to pass sentence on anyone,

one way or the other, is presumptuous and goes beyond the limits of our right and ability.

### **Self-Examination**

Let us not miss the emphasis of the passage calling for self-examination either. While judging is a dominant theme, so is the need to examine self. We have a tendency to ignore our own faults while seeing clearly the faults of others. We are not prohibited from seeing the faults of others, and even calling them to the attention of others. But we are foolish to think that we have none. We must ever take stock of our own lives and see wherein we, also, may be in need of correction. Those who are unwilling to look at themselves, thinking that all the "motes" are in the eyes of others, and ignore the "beams" in our own eyes, are not serving God properly.

The passage does not require that one be perfect before he can recognize error and sins in the life of others. None can be sinlessly perfect. But recognition of sin and error is required of us all.

One reason for removing the beam out of our own eye is so we can be more helpful to those who have motes in their eye. This requires self-examination. To fail to self-examine while condemning others is hypocritical. The Lord's attitude toward hypocrites cannot be mistaken. He has already expressed Himself in this Sermon on the Mount concerning such things. He speaks even with more force in Matthew twenty-three on the subject.

Such then is the teaching of these five verses. There is to be the one and same standard of judgment, God's standard. There is to be the right standard of judgment, again, God's standard. We are not to pass sentence, but leave that to God. We must recognize and except our limitations. At the same time we must accept and recognize the judgments God has already made and not contradict them because that would be judging God. And we certainly must involve ourselves in self-examination. Actually, we can help one another through righteous judgments.

\* \* \* \* \*



## **When the Trumpet Shall Sound**

*"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (First Thessalonians 4:16-18). Without doubt we are not able to comprehend the full significance of that awesome day when Christ returns, the judgment, and entrance into glory for the redeemed. But I am sure that everyone who believes the Bible to be God's Word wants to be "in Christ" on that day.*

# *The Last Word*

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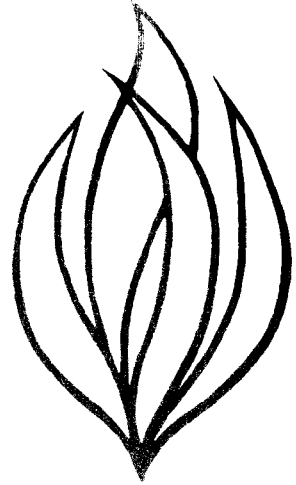
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# A Burning Fire



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

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# Sermon on the Mount

## Lesson Thirteen - Matthew 7:6

After the Lord had given His teaching concerning the making of judgments, He said, "*Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.*" (Matthew 7:6). This lesson will concentrate on just this single verse, taking note of what things are included in this teaching.

At first, the words may seem extremely harsh because of the comparison and analogy made of dogs and swine to people. But rather than being a harsh statement, it is one that suggests there are limits beyond which one need not go in trying to convert the lost. There is a definiteness in this teaching and many people equate anything that is definite with harshness. Some would likely rise up at this point and even criticize the Lord for being too hard on sinners.

Dogs and swine are beasts and have no sense of appreciation for things sacred. They have no power of discernment between things holy and anything else. They have no sense of values regarding such things as relate to the soul and spirit of the human being. When something valuable is placed before them, they might ignore it or treat it as if it had no value. They show no respect or concern for the refined than they would the unrefined and worthless. To them a garbage can is of as much value as a finely set dinner table. Dogs and swine will even trample under foot things precious, not realizing or caring about what they do or the value of what they trample.

What Jesus is teaching is that the way of truth, that way which the disciples were soon to proclaim to the world, is holy, sacred, and deserving of the greatest respect because that is the way of God. Yet, He knew that there would be those who were so evil, profane, impious, and wicked that they would have no reluctance to treat it

with disrespect through ridicule, indignities, and contempt. Not only would the truth be so treated, but those who taught the truth and tried to follow it would also be subjected to contemptible treatment. When the Lord talks about some being like dogs and swine, He was referring to the nature of their character and their attitude toward the very thing for which He would die.

### **Disrespect for the Sacred**

We surely see many manifestations in our own day when things holy and sacred are being subjected to the most abominable injustices and blasphemies. So-called worship services have been turned into periods of licentious music, lascivious dancing, activities more akin to the road house and dance floor than those expected in a house of worship. The teaching of the Scripture is sometimes presented in terms that are vulgar, cheap, degrading, and likened unto the "jive talk" of the most uncouth nature. The truth of the Bible is made to appear to condone the very things our Lord has condemned. Someone will say, "The good book says..." when they have no real respect for the Bible and misapply and distort what it does say. It is not unheard of for people to quote Scripture in a fashion as to give it a so-called double-meaning, one which is evil and sinister.

Have you listened closely to the so-called gospel songs that people perform? The beat of them is as jazzy as the most worldly sounds. The singers jump and dance around like rock-and-roll noise makers. Their bodily movements are as sensual as anything you have seen or heard even among the most noted reprobates. Possibly this is the "holy wow" the digressive liberals who have torn the church apart with their heresy would like to present for the "baby boomers."

In the address of God, some think it is the "in" thing to refer to the heavenly Father in trite, "good ole buddy" terms, failing to honor and glorify His name and His Deity. Prayer is made as if it were just a conversation between two next-door neighbors. Reverence and respect is totally lacking. The name of Deity is repeatedly used

in profanity. Only those who have the attitude of swine and dogs toward sacred things would do such a thing.

There is not very much about God that has escaped the sacrilegious conduct of the irreligious, ungodly, and degenerate. It is great sport to them to mock that which is considered holy and sacred by Christians.

### **People of Responsibility**

As one studies the conversions revealed to us in the Bible, he soon becomes aware that those who were converted were people who at least had some sense of responsibility toward things higher and nobler than they. Those who revel in the deliberate malignities are seldom touched by the appeal of the gospel. They have no use for it whatever. To them it is something at which to poke ridicule and scorn.

How disgusting it is to see religious people attempt to win over such degenerates by making the gospel appear to go along with them. It is most improper to present the gospel in the language of the ungodly. For instance, some years ago, Billy Graham attended a rock-and-roll revelry in Florida that was inhabited by the long-haired, unwashed, free sex, drug using degenerates. That they needed the gospel like everyone else, probably more than most, is not questioned. But to talk about being "turned on with Jesus," as he did, "being on a trip with the Lord," "being a swinger with Christ," is to drag the holy and sacred through the muck and mire of the worse sort. To talk about the "man upstairs," or address professional golfers and identify Jesus as "the greatest pro of them all," is degrading to Christ. What ever happened to speaking as the oracles of God? (First Peter 4:11). To some, this is communicating. But plain language in dignified speech communicates. To attempt to present the truth in the garb of sin is repulsive. One preacher said he understood why some did not study the Bible. It was because they did not like a book where the hero gets killed in the middle of it. Some have even called Christ the first hippie. This is what Jesus was talking about when He talked of casting pearls before swine. The pearls of truth are being trampled under foot

to the disgrace of those who do it, but also to the dishonor of God.

### **A Miserable Excuse**

The excuse by religious people for talking to others in this terminology is to "communicate on their terms," we are told. Does it do it? There is no evidence whatever that it causes any respect for the Christ. It only suggests that the manner of life and way of speaking that characterizes such wicked people may be acceptable before God as they are. They need to learn some new words. It actually repels even the wicked from the truth to hear truth cheapened in such fashion. It is a shallow and sickening compromise and manifests a spiritual sickness among those who would attempt to convey the gospel in this way. They crave being accepted by anybody, even to the dishonor of God. While there will be those who would speak disparagingly of sacred things, shall we encourage it by doing the same ourselves?

Those kind of people do not want the truth. They love their sins so much they only mock the truth. To present the truth before them repeatedly, only to see and hear them abuse it, is to cast pearls before dogs and swine.

Of course, we should take the gospel to all the world. But did not Jesus teach that there would come times to "*shake off the dust of your feet,*" and go elsewhere? (Matthew 10:14). Did not Paul actually do such a thing? (Acts 13:51). Are we obligated to continue presenting the truth only for it to be trampled and ridiculed? This is the very thing Jesus is teaching ought not be done. The truth ought to be more respected than to allow it to happen. We may not keep people from denouncing the truth, but we can keep from placing it before them in order for them to keep on denouncing it. Leave them and go elsewhere. They have denied themselves the right to hear it anymore.

### **Others Who Reject Truth**

There are those who reject the truth but are not blasphemous against it. There are those who may not agree with the truth, but are at least respectful toward it.

These are not the dogs and swine under consideration. We once had some Mormon "elders" to come to our home and present their "testimony" and I respectfully listened and allowed them to complete what they wanted to say. When I began to question certain things about their doctrine, these young boys became very angry and denounced me as a dog and swine because I would not receive their teaching as they presented it. They walked out the door almost shouting something about Joseph Smith being God's prophet. Just because someone does not accept a thing does not mean they are the dog and swine of which Jesus spoke. Even when one is respectful in denying the truth, he is not among dogs and swine. To deny Mormon doctrine is certainly not denying truth.

Jesus is teaching that holy things and holy matters deserve holy treatment. It is not lack of love for the lost for us to withhold teaching them truth when their repeated reaction is to trample the sacred. Rather, it is a manifestation of love for the truth and respect for the holy to not persist in doing what results in the truth being smeared by one of the devil's servants.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Lesson Fourteen - Matthew 7:7-12**

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

Jesus returns to the subject that He had discussed previously in this sermon. He suggests matters about making petitions unto God, which includes prayer, and also discusses the providence of God in addition to what was discussed in chapter six.

There is that quality about the Greek language that is both interesting and beneficial for us to recognize in these verses. When the verb is in the present tense it carries the idea of a continuing action rather than simply a one time action. In other words, the word "*ask*" does not refer to a single request, but actually means to keep on asking. Jesus is talking about those who will keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking. This suggests a continuing desire to receive the blessings from God, not just a one time supplication for them. There is constant recognition of dependence on God as the source of blessings. Within the heart of those who make up the kingdom, there is this ever-present, constant, always pressing desire to grow and move forward, more and more like Christ. Certain blessings and benefits will come to those who ask, seek, and knock.

### **Conditional Blessings**

Some of God's blessings are unconditionally given. For instance, there are many physical blessings given to everyone whether they have any respect for God or not. Each one receives the sunshine, rain, the benefits of the law of nature. But the spiritual blessings that God bestows are conditionally received. There are certain things one must do in order to receive these blessings. Forgiveness of sins, fellowship with Deity, the providence of God, the hope and assurance of heaven in the next life, are all spiritual blessings that belong only to those who are "*in Christ*." (Ephesians 1:3). Until a person meets the terms of pardon, meets the conditions for entering into Christ, these spiritual blessings are still ahead for him, offered to him, but not yet his. But God expects man to want these blessings He offers through His Son, Jesus Christ.

In verse six, Jesus had just spoken of some who would not have any concern or respect for the holy and sacred matters. They would treat them as a dog or swine would treat costly riches and pearls. In contrast to them are those of verses seven through eleven who have an interest in that which God offers. They have a growing, continual yearning for them. They will keep on asking, seeking, and knocking as they journey through life, and come to Christ, realizing that the way of Christ involves

all of life, and that being a Christian is an everyday matter. They have a never ceasing hunger and thirst for the righteousness of God.

Jesus now assures us that God is able to provide for such as those who want His blessings. His reasoning is simple and clear. If a son asks his earthly father for some benefits, as bread, or a fish, would the father who loves the son give him a stone or a serpent instead of what was needed and requested? Certainly not! Since the Father in heaven is so much greater and superior to any father on earth, how much more will He be able to provide the things needed by His children? If men know how to give good gifts, surely God will give good gifts to His children.

### **A Notable Parallel Passage**

In Luke 11:13 there is a parallel passage on this teaching. There Jesus said the Father would give the Holy Spirit to those that ask Him. Some have taken this to mean that God will grant unto all those that ask the same measure of the Holy Spirit as was granted to the apostles on Pentecost. They believe they have some miraculous powers, something superior to everyone else, some special gift that places them on a pedestal apart from others. They believe there is some kind of personal, literal, actual indwelling of Deity in them. The Scriptures teach that God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit dwell in the Christian, but only as the Christian follows His Word. The Scriptures do not teach that Deity takes up an abode within our bodies, making us mini-gods wherever we are. In Luke the Holy Spirit is put for the things of Matthew that God gives and provides. The Holy Spirit is not a "thing" but a person of the Godhead. Matthew 7:11 and Luke 11:13 help explain each other. It refers to God's provision of the spiritual blessings that are granted through the Holy Spirit and the Word given to those who meet the conditions for entrance into Christ, and who keep asking, seeking, and knocking.

To summarize, Jesus is teaching that those who so love the things of God that they will keep on asking, seeking, and knocking, shall keep on receiving, finding, and having these things opened to them. God is able to

provide and does provide the blessings that will be enjoyed by such people.

### **The Golden Rule**

We come to verse twelve that is sometimes called the Golden Rule. *"Therefore, all things whatsoever that ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets."* (Matthew 7:12). Like so many other passages, people take this one out of its context, lifting it away from its setting, proclaiming it as the all-sufficient rule by which our relationship with each other is to be guided. But as often as not some very vital points are misunderstood regarding this verse. It is not meant to be a cure-all for all human relationships unless we understand the place of the will of God regarding it. The very location of the verse in the sermon is of tremendous significance.

From the first of chapter five until verse eleven of chapter seven Jesus has been teaching WHAT the will of God is. Beginning with verse thirteen, He teaches so as to motivate His hearers to DO that will. Verse twelve is a pivotal verse. We cannot get its full import without the word *"therefore."* *"Therefore"* is a connecting word meaning it connects what has been said previously with that which is to follow. What follows *"therefore"* is how we are to treat one another. But what has been presented before the *"therefore"*? Christ has been teaching the will of God through Him. He is saying, "In view of this will, seeing what the gospel of the kingdom is, and noting the authority behind it, you should treat one another a certain way." Jesus is not simply teaching us to treat others like we want to be treated. He is not saying, "You treat other people like they want to be treated so they, in turn, will treat you like you want to be treated." The paraphrase, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you," might lead us to think this was His message. While there is much merit in the thought of the paraphrase, and might be considered to be included in the passage, cannot we see how such a thought displaces the will of God as the standard of treatment, and inserts the will of man as the standard for treatment? Could we ever say, "You lie for me, because that is what you would want me to do for you?" Can we ever think, "You cover



up for me and cheat for me, because, if things were the other way and our places were exchanged, you would want me to do that for you?" Are we to understand that Jesus is saying, "Find out what the other fellow wants and do what he wants because you would want him to do whatever you want?" No, this is not the Golden Rule as the Lord taught it. Man's wants, likes, preferences, are not the standard to determine treatment one toward the other.

### **God's Will Must Prevail**

Jesus is teaching that we must always consider the will of God in our treatment of others. He is saying in essence, "Seeing what the will of God is, you treat others according to the will of God, and you want and expect others to treat you according to the will of God." Can you now see how on the one hand the will of men might be injected as the standard, whereas Jesus is teaching that the will of God is to be the standard? We are to treat one another the way God would have us treat one another, not simply as we or they might want. What does God want?

It is not God's will that we ever seek revenge against each other, or hit back when we are hit. It is not His will that we try to humiliate each other, seek to destroy each other, assume a dictatorial and superior air over one another. We are not to snub one another, or slander each other, or lie to or about one another. We should not ignore one another, take advantage of each other. Although this is the way many treat others, this is foreign to the will of God. We are not to sin on behalf of others, even if it might seem to be of assistance to another. We are not to do whatever somebody might want us to do, but do whatever is the will of God.

It is God's will that we treat one another with courtesy, fairness, kindness, truthfully, and in love, seeking the other's highest good. We are to be helpful toward each other, sympathetic, and unselfish. We are even expected to stand firm in the faith for our own benefit and that of others.

It is God's will that we lift up each other, not knock down each other. It is not too surprising that many in the world of sin will treat each other differently than what the will of God prescribes. But is it painful when your own brethren will turn and rend you as if the passage of Matthew 7:12 had never been spoken or written.

Jesus said this was the law and the prophets. Under the old law that God gave Israel through Moses the dominant theme was, "God's will be done." Under the prophets who lived subject to the Mosaic system and by the directions they received from God, this was their guiding principle, "God's will be done." Under the new covenant of Christ the same theme prevails. As Jesus prayed when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane, "*Not my will but thine be done.*" So it is in our treatment and conduct toward each other. The will of the Lord be done, and not our own. This is the Golden Rule. Without the emphasis of the will of God being the standard, we will miss the major thrust of the teaching.

Christianity is not just a single action, but rather a continuing, growing, expanding, "keep on keeping on" way of life. God will provide what is needful to those of that disposition. In view of the will of God, we are to treat each other according to that will.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Nearing the End of the Series**

With two more lessons, the sixteen lesson series on the Sermon on the Mount will be concluded. Space permitting, we shall also include a short lesson regarding evangelism, which is most appropriate following the study of the Sermon on the Mount because of the nature of the Lord's sermon and our responsibility to proclaim to the world His gospel.

Again, we should study His Words, not only for ourselves, but for whatever benefit we might be able to bestow upon others as we try to teach them.

## **Lesson Fifteen - Matthew 7:13,14**

We are now coming toward the close of this matchless sermon that Jesus preached on some unidentified mount in Palestine at the very beginning of His personal ministry and preaching. Beginning with chapter five, Jesus has been teaching WHAT the will of the Lord is. The sermon is the preamble of the new covenant of which Christ is the mediator. The sermon is the gospel of the kingdom, the doctrine of Christ. Verse twelve of chapter seven dealt with the way we are to treat others and expect to be treated by others in view of the gospel standard Christ set forth. In these closing paragraphs we have three separate efforts by Christ to persuade His hearers to DO the will of God that He has taught. He provides motivation for obedience.

*“Enter ye in at the strait gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matthew 7:13,14).*

In this remarkable statement Jesus sets forth four sets of two items each. There are two gates, two ways, two destinies, and two groups of people. The statement is a series of contrasts between the two's. The gates are different, as are the ways, groups, and destinies. These contrasts are the first of three efforts to show His hearers the way they, and we, should choose. He urges us in this manner to follow His doctrine.

### **Two Gates**

Consider the two gates. One is wide and the other is strait, which means narrow and enclosed. The implications of the wide gate are easily understood. Such a gate is easy to enter, taking almost no effort. Being wide, those who pass that way can carry many things with them. But the strait gate is hemmed in and not easily entered. In fact, it is very difficult to enter. Being narrow, one is not able to take whatever he might wish through the gate with him. Take note that Jesus did not

make the gates wide and narrow. He is merely taking note of the reality of the two gates.

Christ urges men to enter the strait gate. He does not force anyone to go that way, but pleads with them to do so. He does not have to tell anyone to enter the wide gate. They do that of their own choice and accord. The wide gate leads to destruction. All enter that gate when they sin, having reached the age of being accountable and responsible before God. As Paul said, "*All have sinned...*" (Romans 3:23). When one sins he automatically enters the wide gate and starts his pathway toward eternal ruin. But Christ pleads with men to enter the narrow and strait gate.

The word "*enter*" implies the necessity of some effort on the part of the one who would enter. Luke 13:24 records the words, "*Strive to enter in at the strait gate.*" The word "*strive*" is translated from the Greek word from which we get our word, "*agonize*," make an extreme effort, go to all lengths, fight painfully, constantly to enter the strait gate. It may be easier for some to enter than for others, but it takes effort on the part of all who would enter that gate.

The Lord expects us to enter the strait gate. He said to enter, and He meant for man to enter. Picture a man with a burden upon his back as he approaches the narrow, strait, hemmed in gate. He would like to take his burden with him, but there is not room. His burden, like man's sins, are cumbersome, and cannot be taken through the strait gate. They must be left behind. Before one can enter the strait gate that will lead to the blessings of God, one must leave his sinful ways and thoughts behind him, and be forgiven of his burdens that he cannot take with him. It is sad, but true, that many, upon learning they cannot take their sinful ways with them continue their way down the way that leads to destruction. They prefer their burden of sin to the joys of the Lord.

One additional thought is that each one must enter the gate for himself. Nobody can enter the strait gate on behalf of another. We can encourage each other, and

persuade each other, but ultimately it is a personal matter to which each must attend for himself.

### **Two Ways**

Consider the two ways, or roads, that one might travel. One is broad, easily traveled, plenty of smooth pavement, downhill. But it is a very deceptive way because it eventually leads to fatality. It is the way of self-gratification, sin, indulgence, disrespect, and disobedience to God. It is the way of the transgressor that eventually becomes a way that is hard.

In contrast, there is the narrow way. While the other is somewhat like a wide open thoroughfare, this one is steep, often having stumbling blocks and hindrances along the path. It is narrow because it is shut in by restrictions and commandments, do's and don't's. It is not the super highway with its appeal for satisfaction of fleshly lusts, but it is like a bumpy, backwoods road in comparison. Though narrow, it is wide enough for all to travel if they would. But it is narrow enough to exclude those who are wicked. These two ways are symbolic of the two ways of life, one for sin, self, and Satan, and the other for God and His glory.

### **Two Groups**

Now consider the two groups of people Jesus mentions. All mankind is pictured in these verses. None are excluded that are accountable before God. These two groups are defined in relative terms, one being called the "*many*," and the other being called the "*few*." The broad way is more crowded because it is the popular, easy, sinfully pleasant way. People can travel that way along with the majority without restraint, discipline, or denial. Many choose that way of life along with that group of people. But many will not make the effort to enter the narrow gate nor travel the narrow way.

But the "*few*" will go the way that is narrow. Even though much is required and at times the costs are demanding, there are those who choose to leave their sins behind, enter the strait gate, and travel through life on the narrow road.

In view of this passage, have you not wondered why most people think they are going to heaven? One survey has suggested that eighty-six per cent of those who answered the inquiry about whether they think they will go to heaven or not were confident they would. But the Lord implies that the majority will not go the right way. This being true, does it not behoove us to stop long enough to make investigation and be sure concerning the most important matter of our existence; namely, are we on the right road as the will of God has defined that road? Not only shall the criminal, villain, profane, and degenerate person be traveling that road, but also the negligent, disobedient, indifferent, and lukewarm. This is the way traveled by liars, cheats, murderers, gossipers, the immoral and worldly people. The faithful Christians compose the "*few*" on the other and right road.

### **Two Destinies**

At last, consider the two destinies the Lord presents. The Bible is a great book in that it tells man from whence he came, why he is here, what he is to do while here, and where he is going. We have no choice as to our being here. But our duty is set by the Lord while we are here. There are purposes for our existence. But our destiny, we can determine. While God has already predetermined which gate, which road, and which group will enjoy which destiny, we have the power to choose the gate, way, group, and destiny we wish. Man is created as a creature with the power of choice. Jesus is presenting these realities with the goal of motivating us to make the right choice. When one has entered the wide gate through sin, if he continues on that broad way with the "*many*" group, he shall suffer destruction. But if, after having sinned and started on the wrong road, he will turn to the strait gate, leave his sinful burdens behind, travel the narrow way with the "*few*" group, life eternal shall be his to enjoy with God. Someday, for the faithful, when the last hill is climbed, when the final stumbling block is passed, when the beckoning of the devil to forsake the way and take an easy detour is heard no more, and the last step is taken, there is joy forever.

There really is not a more serious question that one can ask concerning himself than the question, "Which gate,

way, group, and destiny for me?" You can decide for yourself, and each one must and will decide.

We enter the strait gate by obeying the gospel commands to enter Christ. We travel the narrow way by being faithful as a Christian. We shall be in the company of the saved, onward marching toward the life that God provides for the redeemed.

\* \* \* \* \*

## **Lesson Sixteen - Matthew 7:15-29**

By the time we reach the last portions of the Sermon on the Mount, we have had many major precepts and principles of doctrine given us by Christ. There remains but two major points, both of which very logically form a part of the persuasive conclusion of this preamble to the new covenant of Christ, His doctrine, the gospel of the kingdom. Having preached WHAT the will of God is, and having shown in a series of two's what our choice should be, He now warns against false teachers that would lead astray, offering strong exhortation to obey.

We have studied eight Beatitudes which are characteristics of those in the kingdom; three Similitudes comparing the kingdom to the light of the world, the salt of the earth, and a city set on a hill; the difference between His new covenant and the old law given by Moses; that the way God makes man righteous is the gospel, which exceeds all other systems, and is the only way. He gave specific teaching regarding hatred, murder, lust, adultery, marriage, divorce, oaths, when resistance is appropriate, and loving both friend and foe. Chapter six discussed the Lord's displeasure at hypocrisy, a lesson on prayer, where true treasure is, keeping the heart clear and precise, focused on God rather than mammon, the impossibility of serving two masters, and the providence of God. The first part of chapter seven taught the proper standard for making judgments, the refusal to defame what is holy and sacred, God's ability to give man what man needs, the Golden Rule, and the series of two's we mentioned.

Christ preached these words, as did His apostles later, in the expectation that many would reject them. But He also knew some would receive them and live accordingly. He also knew that there would be those who would subject His followers to philosophies, ideologies, theories, and doctrines that are false, leading them astray. So He graciously warns of such in order that those who love the Lord might be aware and stand fast.

### **A Warning in Matthew 7:15-10**

*"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree bringeth forth corrupt fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore, by their fruits ye shall know them."*

A false teacher never presents himself as an enemy, but a friend. Enemies are immediately opposed and recognized if announced as such. A false teacher comes as a friend and gains a foothold, winning confidence of others, appearing among the flock as another sheep. But they are as destructive to the flock as a wild and ravening wolf. Satan can and does present himself as an angel of light (Second Corinthians 11:4). Deceptively, with charm, personality, and appearance of sincerity and knowledge, the false teacher gradually makes his way into the hearts and minds of others.

How can one know a teacher is a false teacher? They must be put to the test. *"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they be of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world."* (First John 4:1). Nobody should object having what they teach measured by the Word of God. That which clashes and is at variance with the Word is false. We cannot measure with that with which we are unfamiliar. Discerning between truth and error begins with knowledge of the Word. People without knowledge can be deceived and led astray. The ill-informed, misinformed, uninformed are easy prey for false teachers. Knowledge protects us.



The ultimate destiny of the false teacher is that he is cast away and destroyed. But if one follows a false teacher, Jesus said, *"And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."* (Matthew 15:14).

### **Obedience Taught in Matthew 7:21-27**

*"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he which doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock, and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."*

Christ teaches the wisdom of obedience and the folly of disobedience. Having taught as He did, Jesus expects man to conform to the doctrine from heaven. There is more to following the Lord than knowledge of His will. There is more than a religion of words. There must be compliance, obedience, the doing of His will, action in life. Not just any action will suffice, but action that is authorized by Him. It must spring from a good and honest heart, but also be right as His will reveals it.

Jesus shows the disappointment for any whose faith is merely verbal. We would emphasize that the actions intended to glorify the name of God must be in His name, according to His authority. Doing as we wish is not acting in His name. There must be the doing of the right thing for the right reason. Action and attitude, the right motive behind the right deed, is what Jesus taught.

### **The Firm Foundation**

Building upon the right foundation is essential. No house is more secure than its foundation. A house built upon a weak, sandy foundation cannot stand when adversity comes against it. On the other hand, the house built on rock cannot be moved. So it is with man's service before God. There is no surer, stronger, more dependable foundation for life than Christ. He is the only tried and true foundation.

To hear and do is the way one builds upon the rock foundation. It takes hearing, understanding, comprehending, and intellectual grasp of what the will of God is. Then it takes following in daily living with obedience to that will. Trust and obey is the only way. Otherwise, we build in vain because our spiritual house will collapse, being on the sands of human doctrines.

How tragic it is to be given the opportunity to build on the rock, but neglect that opportunity for the paltry offerings of this world. When one persists in living his life his own way, the way of sin and death, he builds on that which will not sustain him. His destruction is inevitable. By this illustration of building on sand or rock, Jesus presents the importance of all that has been taught in the Sermon on the Mount.

### **The Sermon Ends**

Those who were privileged to hear this sermon originally were sufficiently discerning to know that Jesus taught differently from other teachers. They not only marvelled at the content of it, but they detected another difference. Other teachers, the scribes, priests, rabbis, taught the old law as mere interpreters of that law. They would read and explain the details of the law to the people. But they were not the origin and source of the law. The law did not come from them, even from Moses, but from God. It was not their law in the sense that they were the authority behind it. They could teach only what had been revealed. This is all that preachers today can do with the gospel. We can only preach what the Lord has revealed. Man is not the authority.

But when Jesus taught, He taught as One having authority. He was not merely an interpreter of the

teaching. He was not a fellow student of the law. He is the Lawgiver. It came from Him. It existed and had power because of His authority as the Son of God. The message had come from the Father (John 7:16), but He and the Father were together. What Jesus did, Deity did. What Jesus taught, He taught as God. Jesus was different from all other teachers in that He was not just another rabbi, prophet or teacher. He was the Son of God on earth, revealing God unto man and teaching man the revelation of heaven as the One who had come from heaven to deliver it. That which He asserted to be true was demanding of greater respect than anything ever heard before because of Who the teacher was. The doctrine is His. It is the gospel of the kingdom of which He is the King.

### **It Is Authoritative - Matthew 7:28,29**

*"And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine. For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."*

The source, power, support, and authorization behind all that Jesus said was Jesus Himself, the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of man. There is no higher authority. Hence, the necessity to hear and obey His sayings.

Following this sermon Jesus embarked upon a three and one half year period of personal ministry, preparing for that great and notable day when the kingdom, of which this sermon was preview and forecast, would be established. On the first Pentecost after His resurrection, His kingdom came into reality. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the apostles, on that day, proclaimed salvation in His name for the first time. Those who heard, believed, and obeyed were added to the church, the kingdom of God. They were the citizens committed to live according to this preamble, this Sermon on the Mount. All are subject to it, obligated to submit to it. Those is the kingdom have accepted it. To ignore this sermon and profess to follow Christ is to heap disgrace against this worthy proclamation.

\* \* \* \* \*

# ***To Evangelize***

The word “evangelize” is not found in our English translations. We do read of evangelists, and the meaning of evangelizing is found with emphasis in the New Testament. To evangelize means to instruct in the gospel, and convert one to the faith of Christ. The New Testament uses words like preach, teach, edify, admonish, instruct, and similar expressions. To evangelize includes these things and more.

When we comprehend the implications of the term “evangelize,” we are impressed with the fact that whatever this involves, this is the primary work of the church. This involves the process whereby Christians bear fruit to the glory of God. As children of God we are to no longer serve self, sin, and Satan, but God and our fellowman. Certainly the greatest service one can render to another is to bring him to Christ and the salvation Christ provides.

There are many kinds of evangelistic efforts. Each one results in varying degrees of success. The real success of evangelizing is the salvation of a precious soul, once lost, but saved from sin and brought into fellowship with Deity through Christ.

Successful evangelism is ultimately accomplished one person at a time. We may teach and preach to masses, and this we must do. We may even declare the gospel unto nations through electronic methods. But the desired result, the conversion to Christ, must be produced individual by individual. Nations are converted one person at a time. There must always be that personal response to the gospel. So evangelism involves reaching the individual with the saving truth.

## **Requires Motive and Action**

To evangelize there must be action on the part of the Christian. The first command of the Great Commission of Jesus to His apostles and through then to every Christian is, *“Go ye into all the world, (Mark 16:15). “Go*

*ye therefore...*" (Matthew 28:19). Jesus said, Acts 1:8, "*But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.*" This He commanded just before His ascension when speaking to His apostles. The early saints acted in this matter. Acts 8:4, "*Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.*"

The motive behind this action is as Paul expressed in Romans 10:1, "*Brethren my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they might be saved.*" There is no salvation apart from hearing the Word (Romans 10:13-17; James 1:21). Every Christian has a duty to do his own going. Sometimes we say, "Either go yourself or send others." What we really must do is go ourselves AND send others.

### **Near and Far**

Too often we think of evangelism only in terms of distant lands. We respect those who do go to distant lands with the gospel. Their sacrifices and efforts reflect an understanding of evangelism that many of us who stay at home never comprehend. But we must also keep in mind that evangelism can be accomplished near home, with friends, family, neighbors, even our own children. All efforts are vital in getting the work done that Jesus charged. We can be a part of going by sending others, but we can also be a part of going by teaching someone near us. The lost cannot be saved without it. Whether we go personally, provide funds for others to go, or both, evangelism demands going. We must place emphasis on the sinner "coming," but not to the neglect of our "going."

### **Preach the Gospel**

With the going there must be preaching and teaching of truth. That which is to be preached is the gospel (Matthew 28:19,20; Mark 16:15,16; Acts 8:4). None will be saved without the gospel being preached (Romans 1:16; 10:11-17). First Corinthians 1:21, "*...it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*" Preaching and teaching was at the heart of the mission

of Jesus Christ. Matthew 4:17, *"From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* Paul taught the necessity of preaching the Word (Second Timothy 4:2). He was one who went to Antioch, Jerusalem, Rome, Philippi, Berea, Thessalonica, Corinth, Athens, place after place. He taught in schools, synagogues, homes, marketplaces, jails, halls of judgment, by the river's side. Always his message was the gospel. First Corinthians 1:23,24, *"But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness, but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."*

Philip preached Jesus to the Samaritans. He taught the kingdom of God (Acts 8:5,12), giving warning against preaching anything else (Galatians 1:6-9). People may hear many messages and each one may produce certain results. But there is only one message that will evangelize because there is only One that will save. There is only one faith (Ephesians 4:4,5), and one Shepherd and Savior (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

We must know, therefore, that to successfully evangelize means giving emphasis to the way by which one is *"delivered... from the power of darkness and translated... into the kingdom of his dear Son."* (Colossians 1:13). It is popular in religion to omit, minimize, substitute, and change the message to accommodate the doctrines and sins of men. But without the pure gospel, heard, believed, obeyed, evangelism cannot succeed.

### **Confirmation**

Successful evangelism also involved confirmation. Acts 14:22, *"Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith..."* Acts 15:41, *"And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches."*

These passage have no reference to some man-made ritual that some undertake to perform over children who have been sprinkled as infants. This is not an exercise to admit one into full admission and communion of the church as practiced by some denominational bodies. To confirm means to edify, strengthen, exhort, build up,

teach more, providing that which is needful for spiritual growth and maturity.

The necessity of confirmation is seen in the repeated exhortation to grow. Second Peter 3:18, "*But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*" Study is required (Second Timothy 2:15). We are to be doers and not mere hearers (James 1:22). Only through confirmation can one prevent apostasy. God is able to keep us from falling (Jude 24) provided we partake of the food of the Word by which we are strengthened and made capable of resisting the devil and remaining faithful to the Lord.

### **Over and Over**

There is a great need for a Christian who is taught to be taught and reminded over and over. The church most likely to fall away is one that is untaught. Division is more possible. Lukewarmness, indifference, apathy, and succumbing to a mere house keeping operation is more probable when the church, the saved, are not taught more and more. Without confirmation there will be less loyalty, less devotion, more worldliness and hypocrisy alongside compromise. One generation of untaught Christians will plunge the church into another apostasy that will extend for generations. The soul once saved, but unconfirmed, will turn again into the entanglements of the world from which he was delivered.

Confirmation is necessary to Christians to worship, refrain from the appearance of evil in their lives, do good works, respect authority, win others to Christ, reflect Christ and bring glory to God. One reason the Lord's church is beset with so many battles from within is because so many brethren are not taught as they should be. They have been baptized but went to sleep beside the water. Confirming brethren is that essential part to maintain and retain faithfulness by growth and increased spiritual strength.

### **Involves Me and You**

Evangelism involves going, preaching, confirming. It also involves me and you to do this going, preaching and

confirming. The work of the church is carried to a successful end only to the extent that each child of God is involved in going, preaching, and confirming. If Christian, the ones who profess to care for souls, do not evangelize, just who will?

The importance of this work might be emphasized in two ways. What if you and your loved ones were the ones who were unsaved, out of Christ, doomed, without hope, without knowledge of truth, possibly even without knowledge of your own spiritually disastrous state! Would evangelism be important to you? Would you care if anyone evangelized? Had you just as soon die apart from Christ? Or would you want somebody, somewhere, to bring the gospel your way?

It can be emphasize again by just reminding us of the Lord's displeasure with those of us, His children, who make no effort to do their best in His service. Someone loved you enough, Christian brother and sister, to teach you the truth. Do you not think you ought to do as much for some other? Are not these thoughts the mind of things about which we can do something? Will you do something about them?

\* \* \* \* \*

### **When and If You Move!**

Please advise us of your new address as soon as possible so we can continue to send you each issue of **A Burning Fire**. If you fail to do this, the Post Office sends your booklet back to us, we pay additional postage, and the booklet never reaches you. Thanks for this assistance.

**We have some good lessons  
in the works for the next issues.  
I hope they will benefit you.**





## **One Passes; Another Begins**

I try to keep ahead in the preparation of *A Burning Fire* because unexpected interruptions can always arise. At the time this paragraph is being written there remain several months in 1992. But time moves so swiftly that 1993 will be upon us by the time this issue reaches you. As always, most of us reflect a moment on the previous year, and make plans for the next. It is my hope and prayer that each of us may serve our Lord well during the coming months, if permitted to live. After all, the primary purpose for our existence is to bring glory to God. We do this by our conformity to His pattern of things. Let us respect His Word and use this hour to resolve to be like Christ.

# *The Last Word*

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

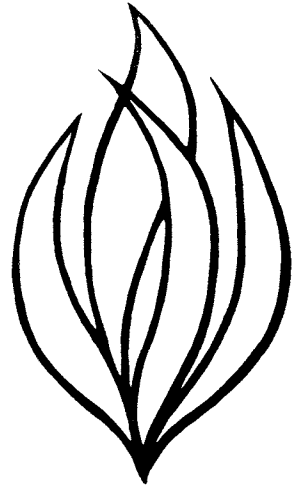
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# A Burning Fire



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

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# ***Do You Recommend Your Religion?***

## **Number One**

The question may be insulting to some because they think everybody knows they recommend their faith. But I believe it is a fair and timely question. Often people take too much for granted. They drift along with the crowds, go the way of trends, are pulled along by the currents, rather than being sure where they stand and that their stand is for Christ. They assume they recommend their faith, and assume it is deserving of recommendation. But it may not be the case. David said, Psalm 66:16, *"Come and hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul."* Among other things, David is saying to his readers and hearers that he heartily recommends his religion to the world. "Let me tell you of the faith I hold, and how it benefits me." He was not offering just a testimonial, but a proclamation of what he believed and why.

A study of religions generally reveals some religions are vain, shallow, empty, and inadequate because they are not from heaven. Many worship gods they have made rather than the God who made them. The Scriptures speak of vain worship and vain religion. While we do not seek to offend by asking, did it ever occur to you the possibility that such might be a proper description of your religion? Is it not profitable to stop long enough to find out and know?

We may not always realize it, but each day we live we are either recommending our religion or renouncing it as not being worthwhile or worth the effort it takes to follow it. We must do some self examination alongside a serious comparison of our religion with what the Bible teaches. We shall ask the question, "Do you recommend your religion?" in four areas: (1) in light of the Scriptures, (2) by the way we live, (3) by the way we support it, and (4) by the way it works for us and all who follow it.

## **The Message**

Do you recommend your religion in the light of Biblical teaching? Indeed, can you turn to Scripture and find recommendation of it? Can you prove your religion? Does God approve of your religion?

First Peter 3:15, "*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*"

If someone came to you and requested, "Tell me about your faith and why you hold to it," what kind of response would you offer? Can we give an answer to those who have a right to inquire? Many would only give such answers as convenience, following the ways of their foreparents, friends, or someone else. Some go the way of human traditions and creeds. It is also surprising and disappointing that many people seem to think it makes no difference what you believe, but they think that way only in matters of religion. Even many brethren seem offended if you ask them why they believe and practice certain things, as if they have no obligation to give answer or show reason for their faith.

## **We Need Bereans**

God does not approve every religion, every message, every practice. For this reason we are to "*examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, and prove your own selves.*" (Second Corinthians 13:5). "*Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good.*" (First Thessalonians 5:21). "*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*" (First John 4:1). If we show ourselves approved of God we must study (Second Timothy 2:15).

This the noble Bereans did (Acts 17:11). Jesus warned, Matthew 15: 8,9, "*This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain to they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*" We are to abide in the doctrine of Christ (Second John 9). If our religion is not found in His doctrine, regardless of how

well suited we might think it is, God does not approve of it, and it is not worth recommendation.

The day is coming when the Lord will say to some, "*I never knew you.*" (Matthew 7:23), even though they had been religious, even thinking they did what they did in His name. But it was not according to His authority or in His name. We must follow the teaching that the Lord has given if we expect Him to acknowledge us as His.

### **Make Sure**

Thomas serves as a good example of making sure our beliefs are well founded (John 20). We usually think of Thomas as "doubting Thomas" because he doubted Christ had risen from the dead as some had told him. But it is well to consider him as "cautious Thomas."

Jesus had met with His disciples (Verse 20), but for some reason Thomas was not among them at that time. (Think what he missed by not being assembled with his brethren!) Later he was told, "*We have seen the Lord.*" but he answered, "*Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.*" (verse 25). Thomas was simply insisting on evidence before he believed. He wanted proof.

This was not unreasonable because Jesus had warned, Matthew 7:15, "*Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.*" Again Jesus warned, Matthew 24:4,5, "*Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and deceive many.*"

Later, evidence was provided him (verse 27). At a subsequent gathering when Thomas was present, Jesus said to him, "*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.*" Then Thomas answered, "*My Lord and my God.*" He was now sure. Evidence had convinced him.

We need to be sure as Thomas. In a world of confusion and many conflicting voices, we must make our calling

and election sure (First Peter 1:10). We can be sure by the evidence provided by God in His confirmed Word (John 20:30,31). Can you recommend your faith in light of what the Word declares?

What of the religious name you wear? To what church do you belong? What of the way you worship? Is the work you do done according to His Word, by His authority? What do you believe about eternity, sin, salvation, heaven, hell, morality, the home, marriage, etc.? Do you turn to some latter day revelation, a catechism, a church discipline or manual, or a confessional to determine your faith? Considering all the many "authorities" people use in religion, it ought to be evident that God does not approve of such chaos and contradictions!

### **By Your Manner of Life**

But do you recommend your religion by the life you live? This gets very close to us. Does our faith and life complement each other, by which I mean, do they harmonize? Or do we say we believe one thing but live as if we believe something quite different? Does your life make your convictions more attractive to others, more appealing, easier to see in you what you believe by what you do? Or does your inconsistency leave one wondering just where you stand and what you believe? After all, we are the only epistle some will ever read (Second Corinthians 3:2). This is unfortunate, but often this is the case. It is as one asked, "If you were arrested for being a Christian, is there really enough evidence to convict you?"

If a man's faith and religion does not affect his life, even change his life, he needs to change his religion. The religion of which Christ is the author changes people from what they are toward what they should be (Romans 6:2, 16,17,22; Second Corinthians 5:17). We are not to be the same kind of person, one in sin, following sinful ways, but a "*new creature in Christ.*"

The change we must know is not only a change of relationship with God, which takes place upon becoming a Christian when we obey the gospel, but involves that spiritual growing process whereby we become more and



more like Jesus. Christianity is a way of living, a life of conviction, not one of mere convenience and conformity to this world. Our lives must "*adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.*" (Titus 2:10). The fault Jesus mentioned so vividly concerning the Pharisees was that they would say one thing but do another. Matthew 23:3, "*...for they say and do not.*" The Holy Spirit condemns "*having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.*" (Second Timothy 3:5). The problem with the Israelites so often in their history was that they were religious, but not righteous. People can perform rituals and forms, even that which is commanded, and their lives and hearts not be in harmony with God.

You have heard it said that you can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time. We need to realize we cannot fool God any time. We shall reap as we sow (Galatians 6:7,8).

### **Our Example**

What we do speaks louder than what we say. One may be heard to say he does not recommend drinking alcoholic beverages, but when he drinks them he recommends them. The same with smoking, or any other habitual vice. Philippians 1:27, "*Only let your conversation (your manner of life, JWB) be as becometh the gospel of Christ.*" Matthew 7:16-18, "*Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.*" James 2: 14, 18, "*What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?... Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.*" The point is that we recommend, or renounce, our faith everyday. A man's faith is in his heart, but it is shown in what he does.

Matthew 5:16, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glory your Father which is in heaven.*" A light bulb does not shine so you can see it, but see what is in the room. A Christian

"shines," by his works, not that he might be seen, but that God will be seen. Professing Christ is not enough (Titus 1:16). *"They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate."* Reprobate does not simply mean wicked, vile, like a scoundrel, but worthless, without value. If we do not recommend our faith by actions we become reprobate. James 4:17, *"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."*

## **Religion and Life**

Have you ever heard it said, "Religion and business do not mix." Or "religion and politics will not mix." "Religion and recreation do not mix." While we must not confuse the faith of Christ as business, politics, or recreation, if the religion is the religion of Christ, it must influence the way a person does in every area of life. The way of Christ makes a person a better neighbor, student, worker, citizen, parent, whatever. Paul recommended his religion by deeds.

Philippians 4:9, *"Those things which ye have both learned and received and heard and seen in me, do, and the God of peace shall be with you."* First Corinthians 11:1, *"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."* Galatians 2:20, *"I am crucified with Christ. Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."*

A religion that does not govern one's life, all the time, is not the religion of Jesus Christ. So let us ask ourselves, "What kind of recommendation does my day to day manner of life provide concerning the faith that I profess?" We profess to follow Christ, we ought to walk as He walked (First John 2:6).

In the second lesson on this theme, we shall examine other matters that contribute to our recommending our faith and religion.

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# ***Do You Recommend Your Religion?***

## **Number Two**

We shall not review the previous lesson. This is an advantage in writing sermons that speaking them does not have. When one preaches a series of lessons he finds it expedient to review previous lessons in order to attain the connection from one to the next. In writing, this can be done by simply referring to the former lessons.

### **Our Support**

Do we recommend our religion by the way we support it? "Here comes a lesson on giving," some might complain. Yes, but is there no need for it? Are you giving as you should? Those who give as they ought never raise objections to lessons on the subject. They rejoice over their privilege to give and the opportunity to learn more about it for themselves and the opportunity for others to learn. Only those who are not doing as they ought will squirm and rage against sermons on giving. "Giving" is a good single word commentary on the religion of Christ. Consider what God has given us. He gave life itself, the world in which we live, every good and perfect gift, even His Son to die in our stead. Has He not given of His love, grace, and mercy that we might be saved? Consider what Christ gave in His example, sacrifice, and hope. The Holy Spirit gave us the Word that leads to heaven. When you truly understand the religion of Christ you understand why giving is such an essential part of it.

But giving involves more than just money, although this is included. That the faith must be supported by Christians is elementary information. Who else cares enough for the Lord, His will, and the souls of mankind to support it? A religion that does not find support for it from among those who profess it is an unworthy religion. It is an admission of weakness and emptiness

to look to others who do not profess a certain faith to support that faith. Some turn to government for support, or business ventures, raffles, even gambling, carnivals, selling ads, etc. to raise funds for their religion. This is an unmistakable sign that their faith is not THE faith of which Christ is author and founder.

### **Endorsement**

People are not hesitant to recommend various products they use, such as detergents, automobiles, cold remedies, food, etc. Most actually take some pleasure in being able to recommend to their friends those things they find useful. Manufacturers have long understood that the best recommendation and support they can receive is a sincere recommendation and endorsement from those who use their product. The same principle is true concerning the faith of Christ.

Second Corinthians 4:13, "*I believed and therefore have I spoken.*" The word, "*therefore,*" means Paul was about to give a reason for believing. He did not believe because he had spoken. He spoke according to what he believed. His words and actions were governed by his convictions. He was simply unable to keep silent on a matter of such universal importance and benefit as the faith of Christ. When he went to Athens, Acts 17:16, "*Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.*" Paul was not ashamed to recommend his faith to one and all.

But too often we think only in financial and monetary terms. While this is not to be minimized, and giving is an item of worship, and by our giving of our means we give honor to God with our substance (Proverbs 3:9), there is more. It would be worthwhile to spend time dealing with monetary giving as Scripture teaches it, however. (First Corinthians 16:1,2; Romans 12:8; Second Corinthians 9:6,7). But there are other ways that call for us to support and endorse the faith. We strongly suggest all these ways be included in our service to God because He has the right to expect us to recommend the faith in every way that is available to us.

## Worship

Faithful attendance at worship and Bible study periods is an additional way. So many who call themselves Christians take this privilege and duty so lightly. They do the cause of Christ such harm. Possibly they do not intend to be a hindrance, but they can be and often are. When non-Christians see professed Christians care so little for obedience to the commands surrounding worship and Bible study, just how do we expect them to be impressed? We withhold recommendation of our faith by our irregularity in attendance, forsaking assembling, as well as show contempt and disregard for the command of Deity.

Offering words of encouragement to each other, cooperating with each other in the work, acts of kindness and goodness, all are ways to show we recommend the faith. There are times when conflicts between what this world demands and what the Lord demands arise before us. Only in times of such conflict are we really able to show our priorities and to demonstrate the Lord is first with us. Without any conflicts of concern, we never are faced with such an opportunity. Just how do we do when we have to make choices? Do we recommend our faith, or do we go the way of the world, the way we want, the way others pressure us to go? It is most inappropriate for Christians to allow social events, recreation, vacations, friends, family, the mundane matters of this life, to become a superior concern to us before our loyalty to Christ. Christians are to be "*zealous of good works*," (Titus 2:14), "*ready unto every good work*," (Titus 3:1), "*full of good works*," (Acts 9:36), "*careful to maintain good works*," (Titus 3:8), and be "*fruitful in every good work*," (Colossians 1:10). This gives support to the faith when we obey these expectations.

There is the story of a hungry, cold child gazing through a store window at a doll. One lady observed and her heart was touched. She bought the doll and gave it to the child, fed her, clothed her warmly. As they parted the little girl asked, "Are you God's wife?" Is not this what the church should radiate, being the bride of Christ? We are to be found supporting the Lord's way to the extent

people will think we are God's, not for our glory, but His. When we do this, we recommend our faith.

### **By the Way It Works**

Do we recommend our religion by the way it works, not only for us, but how it will work for all who follow it? What good is your religion to you? Does it provide that which is sure and stable?

When we experience good fortune, does our religion provide soberness for us to temper us, lest we be swelled with pride? Does it provoke us to thanksgiving? In times of crisis, does it provide the support, comfort, assurance, and courage we must have to overcome, and if we cannot overcome, to endure? When you are lonely and sad, discouraged and suffering because of some great loss, where does your religion come in?

Surely, we must have a week long religion, not just a Sunday religion. We need that which we practice every day, and one that blesses throughout the week, whatever the week may produce. Christianity, when hungrily partaken of, and consistently applied, will work for the benefit of the Christian.

First Corinthians 10:13, *"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 to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."* We can paraphrase the basic meaning of this promise of God to His children when we say, "There is nothing that shall happen this day that God and I together cannot handle." This is God's own promise.

Psalms 3:3, *"Thou art a shield for me."* Psalm 84:11, *"No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."* Hebrews 13:5, *"...for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."*

Because God is man's help, refuge and strength, we may say we *"...will not fear what man shall do unto me."* (Hebrews 13:6). In Christ, through Christ who loved us, we can be *"more than conquerors."* (Romans 8:37).

We can say with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, "*Our God is able.*" (Daniel 3:7). As Paul wrote, "*...able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.*" (Ephesians 3:20). What more could one want? All things needful will be provided if we seek Him, His righteousness, and His kingdom first (Matthew 6:33).

### **Forgiveness**

But most important of all, the religion of Christ provides forgiveness of sins. Christ came to bring peace between man and God by providing the way of salvation, the way of forgiveness of sins, that barrier that man erects between himself and God. By following His will we can be saved from what will otherwise destroy us in hell. We can have peace, hope, purpose, strength for life, as well as a guide for life. All this is offered, as well as the eternal reward of heaven. We can recommend our faith, if our faith be THE faith, because THE faith is the only way that does this for us, and for all who will love His appearing (Second Timothy 4:6-8).

In summary, can we, do we, recommend our faith? If it be THE faith of Christ we are obligated to do so. This is a part of being faithful in THE faith. Can we prove it is THE faith revealed in Scripture? Do our lives show we believe it is important and commend it to others by the way we conduct our lives? Do we support it in all the ways and avenues open to us, with time, talent, prayer, money, deed, word, and work? Can we recommend it because of the blessings we receive from it?

Knowing that the way of Christ is God's way for man, the only way He approves (Acts 4:12; John 14:6), we recommend to you a serious study of THE faith of which we read in Scripture, and urge each of us to make that faith our religion.

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**Why does it seem some brethren have such a hard time deciding on which side they will be, the Lord's or the liberals? Some like to play both sides. Is that recommending THE faith?**

# **Are We As Wise As They?**

The most important part of any lesson is the Biblical text. You are urged to read the lengthy passage, Matthew 2:1-12, one part of the story that never grows old with the telling of it. It is a story of history that teaches us concerning the way we should go.

The birth of Jesus was in Bethlehem, and was followed, possibly as late as two years later, by a visit paid the Christ by wise men. We do not know with certainty how long after His birth they came, nor do we know the number of them that came. It has been often concluded that there were three wise men, but this is determined because three gifts are mentioned. We can only be certain that there were two or more?

They are said to be wise men. In what ways were they wise? Are we as wise as they proved themselves to be? Surely, the Holy Spirit did not use the term loosely and without meaning when they are called wise. Their wisdom may well have been worldly wisdom. Even so, we cannot escape being impressed with the wisdom they manifested surrounding their visit to Christ. We must remember, however, that worldly wisdom is not necessarily wisdom in the sight of God.

## **Two Kinds of Wisdom**

Man's worldly wisdom often proves to be his downfall. Jeremiah 9:23,24, *"Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord."* Man's relationship with God determines the boundaries of his wisdom.



There is a wisdom that “*descendeth*” (James 3:15), and is earthly, sensual, and devilish. It takes one downward. First Corinthians 1:19-21, “*For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.*” It is evident that what man considers wisdom is not always what God considers wisdom.

Who is really a wise person? James 3:13, “*Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness and fear?*” His manner of life determines whether he is wise or unwise. The men of Matthew chapter two proved themselves wise by what they did. There are at least eight marks of wisdom manifested by these men that we shall mention briefly, with the question before us, “Are we as wise as they?”

### **Interested in Christ**

First, they were wise because they were interested in Christ. Having heard of him sufficiently to inquire concerning Him, they came to visit. We are also wise to show interest in Christ. How tragic that some manifest no interest in the Son of God. He is our hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). He alone hath the words of eternal life (John 6:68). He is the way to the Father (John 14:6). What a wonder that all are not concerned with the means of salvation, forgiveness, spiritual success, and the life beyond this one.

### **Searched for Christ**

Second, they were wise in that they made a search for the Christ. This took effort on their part. Some may have a passing interest about Christ, but not sufficiently to search for Him. The Lord taught that “*the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, SEEKING (emphasis, JWB) goodly pearls.*” (Matthew 13:45). Would he ever have found the goodly pearl, the pearl of great price, if he had never sought for it?

Luke 13:24 speaks of striving to enter in at the strait gate. The word strive is akin to our word agonize, implying effort, even with difficulty if necessary, to accomplish entrance. They made the effort.

### **Personal Search**

Third, they were wise because they did not let someone else do their searching for them. Herod sought the child, although his motives for doing so were sinister. But he could have probably succeeded if he had not depended upon the wise men to do his searching for him.

Today, too many are willing to let others search for Christ in their stead. They look to parents, husband, wife, child, preacher, anybody. While we surely can and should assist each other in every way we can to come to a knowledge of the Christ, there are those things where *"every man shall bear his own burden."* Nobody can be saved for you. Nobody will be lost for you. Nobody can do the work of searching and learning the truth without each one showing cognizance of his personal responsibility in the matter. The wise men did not make this mistake. They showed wisdom.

We simply cannot trust in men, but only in the Lord. Even those people we love and trust cannot be our ultimate standard. It is possible for people to be misled. First John 4:1, *"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they be of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world."* The men of Berea were called noble because they searched the Scriptures daily to learn what was so (Acts 17:11). We are taught to *"prove all things; hold fast to that which is good."* (First Thessalonians 5:21). Jesus warned about the blind leading the blind and both falling into the pit (Matthew 15:14). Did not the foolish virgins depend too much on others (Matthew 25)? Inasmuch as each shall stand before the seat of judgment (Second Corinthians 5:10), each should be personally concerned with learning the truth for themselves.

### **They Asked**

Fourth, they not only did their own searching, but they were wise in that they were not too proud to ask for assistance and guidance when they needed it. They did not possess the know-it-all attitude. Like the Ethiopian who was reading from Isaiah, when Philip asked if he understood what he was reading, he responded, "*How can I except some man guide me?*" (Acts 8:31). He forthwith invited Philip into the chariot and allowed himself to be taught.

Did not Apollos act wisely to permit Aquila and Priscilla to teach him the way of the of the Lord more perfectly? (Acts 18:26). Many other preachers might have had the attitude that others could not really teach them anything. Even though this man was mighty in the Scriptures, and eloquent, he was willing to accept guidance from others. We are doomed to ignorance when we conclude we cannot learn more than we know. This does not mean that what we already know is necessarily incorrect. It means that there is always room for growth in knowledge, and others sometimes can help us. A mark of an educated man is the realization that he does not know everything, even though some with the highest academic degrees act as if they think they do.

These men in our text, the men from the east, were wise to make inquiry, even if it was from Herod, to learn the whereabouts of the One they sought.

### **Followed the Light**

Fifth, they followed the light God provided. First it was the star in the heavens; then the light afforded them from the prophets who had foretold of the One to be born in Bethlehem.

God has also given us light to guide our feet in this life toward heaven. "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my pathway.*" (Psalm 119:105). We have the inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, all-sufficient Scripture to serve as our guide (Second Timothy 3:16,17).

### **Paid the Price**

Sixth, they were willing to pay whatever the price to find the Christ. From wherever they came, they knew not what it would require of them to succeed, nor how long it would take. But they obviously committed themselves to the task. They had a goal and were dedicated to it.

What is the cost of discipleship? Luke 9:23, "*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.*" Jesus said we are to forsake all that we have (Matthew 19:27), meaning that nothing can come first before Him. We cannot serve Him with reservation. Christ gave His all. Can we be expected to do less? We are to be living sacrifices (Romans 12:1). Is it loyal service to follow His will only when convenient, only when it fits our own plans and will, only when we think it does not demand too much of us? Are we like the man who said he would follow Jesus as long as Jesus went with the crowd?

### **Persistence**

Seventh, they were wise in that they never stopped until they found the child. Obstacles they encountered, but they did not quit.

Today, we may meet obstacles in our desire to be faithful servants of the Lord. These things can even come from people close to us, even family, friends, job, and may demand changes of habits, associations, attitudes, putting away the old man of sin and putting on the new man of righteousness.

Jesus spoke of some who were not far from the kingdom, but they were not yet in the kingdom. The rich, young ruler asked what to do to be saved, but went away sorrowful because, though ever so near, he would not put the Lord before his wealth. But the wise men did not allow any obstacle to cause them to turn away. They kept on keeping on in spite of the fact that the road was not always easy and smooth.

### **They Worshipped**

Their gifts were not "leftovers." Frankincense, myrrh, and gold were riches. They knew the Christ deserved the

best. The Macedonian Christians gave even in poverty because they first gave of themselves (Second Corinthians 8:3). Giving to the Lord is a display of wisdom as well as love and sincerity.

These men who came from the east were wise because (1) they were interested in Christ; (2) they searched for Christ; (3) they searched for Christ for themselves; (4) they sought assistance when they needed it; (5) they followed the light God provided; (6) they were willing to pay the price whatever it took; (7) they would not quit, but stayed with the task; and (8) they worshipped Him. Are we as wise as they?

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## ***Man's Origin, Purpose, and Destiny***

The scope of this title is so overwhelming and inclusive that it ought to be obvious that in the space allotted for this lesson we shall mention only a few of the more prominent matters relative to it. This lesson deals with what we are, how we think of ourselves, which in turn will have a great bearing on how we think and act toward others. It deals with material that is at the same time a source of frustration for many, but contentment for others; unhappiness as well as joy. The failure to know and appreciate our origin, purpose, and destiny is to invite for ourselves a life of emptiness, wicked living, a sense of uselessness, and the concept that life is hopeless. This is the problem in the lives of many today.

On the other hand, knowledge of our origin, purpose, and destiny will give life satisfaction, hope, dignity, radiance, abundant joy, and will serve as a deterrent to

evil plus a motivation to do good. This lesson goes a long way explaining why, in the same society, with some there is a glowing joy, and right alongside others who live in deep despair.

Until one knows where he came from, why he is here, and where he is going his life will be a great mystery. That pressing question as to "what life is all about" will remain unanswered until we understand this subject.

But we can know. The Bible gives us the answer to all three areas of concern, origin, purpose, and destiny. This is one of the evidences of the divine inspiration of the Bible and a reason for its greatness. In the inspired writings that God has provided through inspired men guided by the Holy Spirit. He tells us that which we need to know.

### **Origin**

The Biblical explanation of man's origin is brief and simple. Genesis 1:27, *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."*

There is the living spirit of man that is housed in this material body made of the dust of the ground. This spirit remains inhabited there until what is called death, physical death, when the spirit and the body are separated (James 2:26). Ecclesiastes 12:7, *"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."* Such an explanation of man's origin is harmonious with all that man has learned, all that he does know, and all that he can demonstrate to be true. This explanation gives man his dignity and distinction as a human being, and is the reason we can even speak of such things as human rights, human dignity, self-respect, and it shows that human life is sacred. This is why animals are killed for food for man, but man is not killed to feed animals. This is why the killing of innocent man is murder and the killing of animals is not. This provides the reason for man being and doing differently from all other of God's creatures. This is the basis for morality and the necessity of proper relationships among humans. Man is

of God, having come from God, has been created by God, has a duty to God, and is both body and spirit.

Since none observed the beginning of man, we must rely upon divinely given revelation to know how it came to pass. Whether one believes the Biblical record or some other explanation, such as organic evolution, it is a matter to be decided by the evidence. It is not a matter of observation, but revelation. The origin of man cannot be determined scientifically because the nature of science is too limited to be involved. Science deals with that which can be observed, tested, weighed, measured, and demonstrated. Such is impossible with man's origin.

The question we must answer is which of the explanations put forth, creation or evolution, dignifies man, harmonizes with what we can observe and otherwise know. Which is reasonable, logical, believable, and concurs with the evidence available.

Is it reasonable to believe that such a marvelous and intricate creature as man is just the result of some undesigned, unintended, unplanned, naturalistic accident without purpose whatsoever? Inasmuch as the evolutionary theories contradict many provable processes and scientific facts, and creation violates not one, which is the most reasonable to accept?

We accept the act of creation by faith, but not a blind, naive, ignorant, superstitious, unsupported faith. Faith is founded on revelation and evidence. The evidence is so overwhelmingly one-sided as to the origin of man that we must conclude that the claim that evidence supports evolution is one of the most deadly and deliberate lies being perpetrated among mankind today. Creation, not chance, is the origin of man. Genesis 2:7, *"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."* There can be no "improvement" on that explanation.

There are basically two kinds of evolution regarding the attitude toward God. There is atheistic evolution and theistic evolution. Atheistic evolutionists deny the existence of God altogether. They claim that man is

totally material, and the result of naturalistic happenings, the result of chance, only a more highly evolved animal than other animals. Their explanation removes any and all reason for the existence of man or purpose for his life. It destroys the dignity of mankind, his distinctiveness from the animal world, the need or propriety of morality, or any basis for what is called "human rights." Humans are only living things, and nothing more. There is no "oughtness" regarding his behavior any more than among beasts.

They claim that something existed (although they know not what it was nor from whence it came) and that something somehow exploded (like the "big bang" theory). From this came unexplainable naturalistic events that eventually, somehow, produced a single living cell. That cell somehow began to evolve into a multi-celled creature. Through eons and eons of time, in a natural way, this single cell ultimately evolved into what is called man. Their contention is that from something non-living there came life; from the single cell came man. In fact, from this single cell they tell us everything that lives eventually came into being, plant and animal. You may not have known that when you eat vegetables you are eating a far removed relative.

With this kind of outlook toward humans, little wonder there is clamoring for abortions, the destruction of the unwanted, even some talking of the disposal of the sick, aged, or otherwise "undesirables." Human life has no sacredness among evolutionists nor can there be if they hold fast to their theories. Evolution neither explains where we came from, why we are here, or where we are going except from nowhere, for nothing, and to the grave. What a concept of human life?

Theistic evolutionists with futilely try to please error and truth at the same time. They do not deny the existence of God but contend that God used the process of organic and naturalistic evolution to produce man. The only real difference between an atheistic evolutionist and a theistic evolutionist is the source of the original single cell from which all life on earth is supposed to have come. Atheists say it just happened from something that exploded and somehow developed.



Theistic evolutionists say God created the single cell and turned it loose to follow its natural development.

Both systems have the same problems scientifically, the same dilemma, the same unanswered questions and inconsistencies. Both lack evidence that such a developmental evolutionary process from a single cell to man has ever occurred. The incongruities of man originating in such a fashion hold with equal force against both kinds of evolutionists. It is really foolish to speak of atheistic evolution and theistic evolution when the evidence is against there being any such organic evolution as they propose to ever have taken place at all.

Biblically they face the same problems. The Bible teaches that God created all things in six days (Exodus 20:11), some of our compromising and modernist so-called "scholars" notwithstanding. The word "*day*" comes from the Hebrews word "*yom*" which when used with a numeral refers to what we call a solar day, or a twenty-four hour day. Each day had an evening and a morning.

Some evolutionists contend that "*day*" refers to long periods of time. We admit that "*day*" does not always mean twenty-four hours, but it does when used with a numeral. Furthermore, since each day had both evening and morning, if the evolutionists were right, they disprove the possibility of naturalistic development. There would necessarily be long periods of darkness which would make impossible the growth of vegetation. Everything would freeze and die for lack of light.

To contend for evolution contradicts Jesus. How anyone who would claim to be a Christian can hold to a theory that contradicts the Lord only demonstrates the inconsistency and egotism of theistic evolutionists who say they are Christians. Jesus said God made them male and female "*from the beginning*" (Matthew 19:4). Was He wrong about that? If He was, what does this say about His Deity? Scripture says man was man from the time there was life in him. Genesis 1:27 teaches humans were created, not evolved. There is no way an honest mind can hold both evolution and the Bible. You will have to become mentally polluted with anti-God philosophies in

the "halls of learning" before you can become that ridiculously stupid and nonsensical.

Furthermore, that things produce after their own kind is a proven fact and is demonstrable and observable. Nor does life come from non-life; mentality from no mentality. Man was made lower than the angels and superior to animals, not just another animal that out-developed others. Man came into being as a man. There is absolutely no room for the organic evolutionary process in the Biblical or scientific record. There is no room or reason for the attempt to harmonize between what God reveals in His Word and the unprovable, impossible, accidental explanations of those who do not wish to have God.

### **Purpose**

It should be obvious that since man was created by God that there is a reason for man's existence. The "explanation" by organic evolution removes any reason for man's existence. Solomon said, Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14, *"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."* Man is to live before God, in God's way, and shall be held accountable for the way he chooses to live. His reason for existence is to show fear (respect) to God by obedience to God.

Romans 1:21 teaches we are to glorify God. First Corinthians 11:7 reminds that we are in the image of God and for the glory of God. We are also to cause others to glorify God (Matthew 5:16). We are to walk worthy (worthily) before God (First Thessalonians 2:12).

Life is composed of many activities, privileges, duties, and opportunities, both good and evil. It is intended that in life man be good, do good, as God defines good. In this way he brings glory to his Creator. If man fails here he fails in what matters regardless of that in which he might otherwise succeed. If he succeeds here but fails in all else, he has wonderfully fulfilled his reason for existence. All that we do, in occupation, recreation,

education, religion, family, everything, should be to the glory of God (First Thessalonians 10:31).

The only way to glorify God is to love and obey Him and His will. In our age, since Pentecost, this means becoming and being a faithful child of God through Christ. One cannot honor the Father unless he also honors the Son (John 5:23; First John 2:23). The only source of information regarding His will is in the inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, and all-sufficient Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17).

God wants man to be happy, both now and eternally. He has taught us the course of life that produces this blessedness and He knows better than do we. But He has also graciously warned us of the paths that produce destruction so that we might avoid them. But He has even done more than that. He has provided a remedy for our self-imposed destruction through sin. He offers us the way of redemption and salvation.

Our mission in life and our reason for being is to do His will. Though fame, fortune, and favor of this world escape us, we fulfill our purpose through Christ. Even if fame, fortune, and favor of this world be ours, we miss the mark if we serve not the Lord.

### **Destiny**

But this life is fleeting, temporary, and shall end (Hebrews 9:27). Life is as a vapor (James 4:14). Ecclesiastes 9:5, *"For the living know that they shall die."*

We are but sojourners and pilgrims passing through, on our way to another life. This world is not our home for any of us. But where are we going? It is evident we do not remain here in this life. If there is no other existence for man, then the purpose of life is invalidated and life would be meaningless.

The destiny of man is an eternal one because man is an immortal being. Matthew 25:46 speaks of everlasting or eternal life or punishment. Even though the body dies, this is not so with the spirit (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Even this body shall be raised into a spiritual body (First

Corinthians 15). That we shall exist eternally has been predetermined by the Lord and we have no choice in that matter. The matter that is not yet determined is where each one shall exist. We have a choice about this.

Man is given a choice of his eternal destiny. We are free moral agents with the power of volition and decision. We can choose for ourselves where we shall exist. Our eternal destiny specifically is not forced upon us. But our choice is limited to either heaven or hell.

There is not a great amount of revelation in the Bible of either place. But there is sufficient description for anyone to know where he would rather be.

The very nature of this choice is that each one must choose for himself. None can choose for another. It is a very personal and ye final choice. There are two ways open to us (Matthew 7:13,14), and we will go one or the other. The attempt to make no choice is to not choose the way to heaven.

Christians know where they came from, why they are here, how they are to live while here, and where they are going. They know that man is both body and soul or spirit. These things God has revealed. For this reason the Christian order his life according to the will of Him who shall judge in the last day (John 12:48; Acts 17:31).

When one recognizes his origin is God, then fulfills his divinely appointed purpose to glorify God in this life by lovingly obeying God, then his eternal destiny of happiness is given him by the Lord. Reward and salvation is already assured by God's own promise to the obedient and faithful who through their obedience and faithfulness partake of the grace of God, and the benefits of the blood of the Savior. The faithful Christian has a home in heaven which is reserved for him, a crown of glory that shall never fade.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Have you tried to bring someone to Christ lately?**



## **Critics Who Lack Conviction**

Why is it so often the case that there be those who are severely critical of anyone who criticizes false doctrines and identifies those who teach error, but are never quite able to bring themselves to criticize false doctrines and those who teach error? They can lambast with all manner of derogatory and insulting terms those who stand fast in the faith and prove from Scripture what is truth, but they display no such conviction themselves to the truth, and refuse to say anything against that which is dividing the church and causing souls to be lost. With too many there is cowardice and lack of conviction. Timidity to stand against error is really treason to the Savior. Shame!

# *The Last Word*

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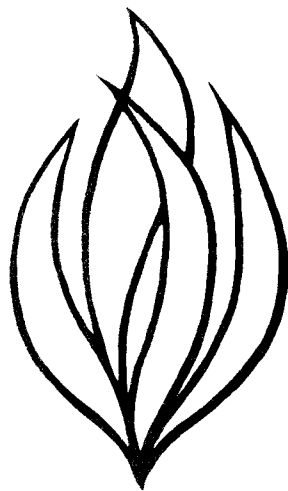
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# A Burning Fire



*"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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# ***Day of Good Tidings***

Our lesson is taken from the seventh chapter of Second Kings and an event that occurred eight hundred to nine hundred years before Christ. The people of God were divided into the two kingdoms of Northern Israel and Southern Judah. Benhadad, king of Syria, besieged Samaria, the capital of Northern Israel, with the result of a terrible famine in the city. The severity of the famine is seen in the high price even for substance that was not to be eaten. People resorted to even eating their children, and starvation was driving them insane.

In the midst of this plight, Elisha, the prophet of God, said, Second Kings 7:1, *"Hear ye the word of the Lord; thus saith the Lord, Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria."* In other words, there would be food supplies in abundance and at a reasonable price. This prediction was so different from what then existed that most refused to believe what he had to say.

Verses three through five introduce us to some special characters. There were lepers in the gate that faced dire alternatives. They reasoned they could remain where they were and die, or enter into the city and die of starvation with the rest, or go over to the Syrian camp, running the risk of being killed, but possibly finding food and help. Of these alternatives, they naturally chose the only one open to them that offered any hope whatsoever. So they proceeded to the Syrian camp.

## **What They Found**

When they came to the camp they found it totally abandoned. The explanation for this abandonment is revealed in verses six and seven. *"For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host; and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. Wherefore they arose and fled*

*in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life."*

Finding no man, they did find plenty to eat and drink, along with treasures and valuable supplies. They began to enrich themselves, enjoying to the fullest their discovery. Verse eight, *"And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver and gold and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent and carried thence also, and went and hid it."* In a very short span of time they had gone from hopelessness and despair, poverty and hunger, into an environment of abundance, joy, and feasting amidst wealth.

One leper took note, verse nine, *"We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace."* As he reflected upon his good fortune he became aware of that good fortune, but also remembered the need of those left in Samaria. He knew he had a duty toward others to let them know of the abundance that was available. He was also conscious that withholding this news from those in need would eventually bring his own condemnation. This was a day of good news and it must be spread to others.

### **The Application**

Let us make a spiritual application of the principles involved in this awareness of this leper. It is a very simple and easily understood application. Jesus said, *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* (Mark 16:15). The word "gospel" means "good news, glad tidings." At the birth of Jesus the angel said, *"Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."* (Luke 2: 10).

The news of the kingdom of God is called *"glad tidings"* (Luke 8:1). When Paul preached in Antioch of Pisidia he said his messages were as *"glad tidings,"* the fulfillment of the promises made to the ancient fathers (Acts 13:32). Romans 10:15. *"How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things."* The gospel of Christ is good news.

Why is the gospel such good news? Consider mankind separated from and without the gospel. Sin separates man from God (Isaiah 59:1,2), and is transgression of the law of God (First John 3:4). All have sinned (Romans 3:23), and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Apart from God we are as strangers and foreigners (Ephesians 2:19), aliens from God's people, outside the covenant relationship with God, without promise or hope, without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12). Without Christ mankind is lost, doomed, damned, frustrated, confused, hopeless, helpless, in doubt and insecurity, with nothing awaiting him but an eternal hell.

### **Saved by the Gospel**

But the gospel is God's way of saving mankind from sin (Romans 1:16). We are saved by the gospel (First Corinthians 15:2). That seed by which we are begotten and by which we are saved is the Word of God (James 1:21; First Peter 1:23). By the power of the gospel the former state is displaced with forgiveness, security, purpose in life, hope, cleansing, sanctification, fellowship with Deity, divine providence, and eventually heaven. Those who have heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel receive the blessings that come from heaven. Those of us who are Christians are much like the unfortunate lepers whose situation changed when they came upon the plenteous camp. We are the ones who have been so fortunate to have gone from spiritual despair, poverty, and hunger of sinful Samaria to now feast at the provisions of the Lord, partaking of His abundance, and basking in the glory of His salvation.

But do we also possess the same awareness and consciousness of our blessings as did the lepers? Are we truly sensitive to our own spiritual good fortune? How concerned are we for those who are still suffering in the starving Samaria of sin? Do we really grasp our duty to the present age to go to them with the gospel, preaching and teaching the forgiveness of sins through Christ? We are to be the pillars of the truth, proclaiming and upholding the truth of God before the world (First Timothy 3:15). Are we as involved in doing this as were the brethren of the first century who went everywhere preaching the Word (Acts 8:4)? We must take stock of our

concern for the lost lest we, like the leper who if he withheld the good news he discovered, would receive a sure retribution for failure and neglect (James 4:17).

Someone has rightly said that we are saved to save. Christ loved us, and we must love others. But can we truly love others who are yet in sin if we do not teach them the way of salvation?

### **We Have Opportunities**

Possibly it would help us to consider some of the opportunities we have to discharge this duty. Making personal contacts, visitation, showing interest in the sick and bereaved is a place to begin. We could be more attentive to funerals. Such times have often been the turning point in the lives of survivors when special interest is shown them and kindness extended.

Everyone should try to teach someone. Not everyone must be a public proclaimer of the Word. But we have learned to converse with people on many subjects and we have the ability to converse with them about the soul. Helpful material and training is available to assist us in doing this work effectively. But how many take advantage of such things?

Most congregations conduct special efforts to teach the gospel in addition to the classes and sermons regularly. Gospel meetings are special times when men of ability and learning are invited into our midst to preach the Word. Not only do many fail to bring others with them, some do not faithfully support such efforts themselves. Some do. Whether we realize it or not, this marks the level of our interest and concern in souls. The very least we could do is to uphold the hands of those who are preaching the Word. We do this when we are present.

One way that is utilized by many is through the distribution of printed materials. Various tracts and other pieces of literature are available and these things contain precise information that the lost must learn. Some have taken the task of distributing encouragements for daily Bible reading among their neighbors with calendar cards suggesting passages for

reading. Placing good tracts in proper localities for others to take and read is one inconspicuous way of spreading the gospel. Enrolling others in correspondence home study courses is another good effort.

### **More That You Can Do**

When the truth comes under attack where you are, whether in the home, at your place of occupation, or even in the church, we can turn our good fortune into the benefit of others by standing firm for the truth without favor or compromise. Often erroneous doctrines and practices arise, and many times Christians are a silent as a tomb regarding it. As one preacher said, "They get lockjaw." They are afraid to stand up for truth, and choose the path of "go-along-ism" as their course of non-action. One reason false ideas can make headway and get footholds is because those who possess the knowledge of the truth refuse to do their duty and tell others the glad tidings of truth.

It would seem without much argument that if I truly am grateful for my own salvation, if I am concerned for lost souls around me as the Lord expects me to be, if I realize my duty as a Christian and have the desire to perform it, if I take seriously the warning of retribution against those who refuse to do their duty, then I, like the lepers of long ago, will realize that today is a day of glad tidings and I will not hold my peace, but will go to others and tell the story of Jesus and His love. Can we be faithful Christians and do less?

\* \* \* \* \*

## **God's Part In Man's Salvation**

Ephesians 2:8,9, "*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.*" This is one of the

great passages of Scripture that tells of God's part in man's salvation.

Our lesson is one that should cause us to love God all the more. The passage is familiar because it presents a basic ingredient in God's plan for saving man. An analysis of the passage shows how man is saved, and how man is not saved. He is not saved by works of which he can boast. It does not say there are no works involved in being saved, but a certain kind of works will not save. Salvation is not by man's merit, not God's payment for good that man does. Man cannot deserve, earn, nor merit salvation.

## **Two Parts**

Salvation is the result of actions taken by both God and man. What man must do is of value only because of what God has done, and because God says it is of value. Man's part is that of obedient faith. God's part might be classified under the heading of grace, an unearned favor bestowed upon man as a gift from God. Romans 6:23, *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* Our lesson shall discuss God's part in God's plan for saving man, leaving man's part for another study.

First, why did God do anything at all to save man? It is because man sins and deserves condemnation (Romans 3:10, 23; 5:12). What difference does that make? It means spiritual death to the sinner (Romans 6:23; James 1:13-15). Man places himself in a predicament from which he cannot extricate himself by himself. He is doomed, damned, hopeless, and helpless. He is dependent on someone to save him.

## **God's Love**

Why God acted at all is explained by the love of God for man. *"God commended his loved toward us..."* (Romans 5:8). *"For God so loved the world..."* (John 3:16). *"Herein is love: not that we loved God, but that he first loved us."* (First John 4: 10). How God has manifested that love is revealed to us in Scripture. Just here we establish the need of man for salvation and the necessity for God to

do something for man because man is dependent upon God. God's motive for acting on man's behalf is because of God's love and grace. We are saved by God's mercy (Titus 3:3-7).

What has God done? For a long time God's plan for redeeming man was unrevealed, even a mystery (First Corinthians 2:7; Ephesians 3:1-5; Colossians 1:26). But His plan is no longer a mystery because it has been revealed by revelation from God through His holy prophets and apostles, now embodied in His Word. We can know His plan by reading what inspired men wrote. Let us go back in time in our thinking to that dark moment when sin entered the world and observe the gradual unfolding of God's plan which has existed from before the foundation of the world.

### **God's Plan Unfolds**

In pronouncing curses on Adam, Eve, and Satan because of sin, God said, 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.*" Not much of the plan of salvation is revealed in this passage, but there is enough for us to know that God would provide a way for mankind from the spiritual injury inflicted by Satan through One who would be the seed of woman. It is significant what is not said. It was not said that Satan would be bruised by One of the seed of man and woman, but only woman, which is an indirect reference to the manner of birth of the One who would come: namely, Christ, by the virgin birth.

God later gave promises to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). Included in the promises that concerned a great nation, a land they would have for their own, blessings upon those that blessed Abraham and curses upon those who cursed him, God said, "*And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.*" That seed referred to Christ (Galatians 3: 16). It becomes unmistakable that God would provide for mankind. A similar promise was given to Isaac and Jacob.

Just prior to the death of Jacob, Jacob blessed his sons. He somewhat narrowed down the lineage through whom

God would fulfill His promises of blessedness for man through the seed of Abraham. Jacob said to Judah, Genesis 49:10, *"The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."* This referred to the coming of Christ, who was of the tribe of Judah. The sceptre was the symbol of being king.

### **A Prophet to Come**

In Deuteronomy 18: 15,18, God told Moses to say, *"The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him shall they hearken.... I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto me, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him."* In Acts 3:23, Peter said that prophecy referred to Christ. More and more the plan of God unfolds. There arises the expectancy of One who was to come who would accomplish for man what God intended to provide.

At Sinai and through Moses, God gave a special law by which Israel was to be governed. The law was not the way of salvation (Romans 3:20). The law was only a shadow of things to come (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1). The law was a temporary measure for the Israelites alone (Deuteronomy 5: 1-3) that was to be operative until Christ came (Galatians 3:22-25). The law was eventually nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14) because Christ fulfilled it (Matthew 5:17). It was not destroyed but was abolished (Ephesians 2:15) because its purpose for existence was accomplished. But the law was not the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham (Galatians 3: 18,19).

### **Israel's Role**

As Biblical history unfolds we recognize Israel as God's chosen nation through which these promises were to become realities. The land of Canaan became their homeland. They became a kingdom and there were numerous prophecies pertaining to the seed of David and prophecies made by David. David was a descendant of Abraham. The Messiah would be of the seed of David. He



would be the Son of God, begotten of the Holy Spirit. He would be devout, teach in parables, and be betrayed. Men would cast lots for His garments, and He would be nailed to the tree, counted among criminals, given vinegar to drink, and buried in a borrowed tomb among the rich. But He would also be raised from the dead and given the throne of David. David's literal earthly throne was a type of the spiritual throne to come. His kingdom would be universal.

Throughout the history of the United Kingdom of Israel, then the period of the Divided Kingdoms, into the times of exile and after the return of Judah from captivity, prophets foretold of the One who was to come and the kingdom He was to establish. *"Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days,"* speaking of the days of the Kingdom of Christ.

### **The Kingdom to Come**

Daniel said the kingdom would come in the days of a fourth empire and would never end. The fourth empire corresponds to the Roman empire. Isaiah said He would be born of a virgin, sinless, meek, quiet of spirit. He told when the kingdom would come and where. It would be in the *"last days"* and begin in Jerusalem. This was foretold some seven hundred years before Christ was born of the virgin Mary.

Zechariah said He would be sold for thirty pieces of silver, but also prophesied the triumphal entry of Christ into Jerusalem which did take place just prior to His betrayal and crucifixion. Minute details of the life, work, death, burial, and resurrection of the One who was to come to be a sin offering for all mankind are presented to us from the Old Testament prophecies.

It was even foretold of one who would come to prepare the way for the Lord, which had reference to John the Baptist (Malachi 4: 5,6). And did these things actually come to pass as foretold?

### **Prophecies Come True**

Finally, the prophecies began to be fulfilled with the coming of John, *"the voice of one crying in the wilderness. Prepare ye the way of the Lord and make his paths straight."* (Matthew 3: 3). The long-standing prophecies from God became historical events one by one, precisely as foretold. Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, in Bethlehem (which place was prophesied). He was taken to Egypt and called from there as the prophet had said. He lived in the despised city of Nazareth as foretold. Point after point was accomplished.

John the Baptist announced, John 1:29, *"Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."* John said, *"The kingdom of heaven is at hand."* (Mark 1:15). The Messiah was on the earth and His name was Immanuel, *"God with us,"* as the angel had said would be the case. Galatians 4: 4,5, *"But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."* Jesus Christ is the One God promised by whom we can become children of God.

### **Soon to Come**

Jesus taught that the kingdom would come in the lifetime of some of those to whom He spoke (Mark 9:1). He was the One who would come to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). It was in Him that the promises made to Abraham were fulfilled (Galatians 3:16: 26-29). He was the Prophet made like unto Moses that was to come (John 1:45; 5:46; Acts 3:23). He came from the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:14). It was through Him that the law of Moses would accomplish its purposes (Galatians 3:19, 23-25; Romans 3:21,22; 10:4). He was the seed of Abraham and of David, the One to rule on the throne (Luke 1:32). He was the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:16), and the Savior of mankind.

But the sending of God's Son was not the completion of God's part in man's salvation. How would Satan bruise the heel of the seed of woman? How would the seed of woman bruise the head of Satan and deliver man? This was accomplished by the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Evil men took Christ to the cross and there He

was bruised. But the power of God made Him victor over death, hell, and the grave by the resurrection from the dead. The great, merciful, gracious, and loving act of Deity that made the final provision for the salvation of man was the death and resurrection of Christ. There payment was made for sins and justice satisfied. There mercy was extended to sinful mankind. Justice and mercy met at the cross of Christ. Hope was offered.

### **By His Blood**

Matthew 26:28 teaches His blood was shed for the remission of sins. Romans 5:1-8 teaches it was because of God's love that Christ died for us. Hebrews 2:9 makes it plain that it was God's plan that *"he by the grace of God should taste of death for every man."* By His blood we are saved (Hebrews 9:12; Romans 3: 24,25; 5:9). We have redemption through His blood (Ephesians 1:7). He became our Passover Lamb (First Corinthians 5:7).

"O to grace, how great a debtor,  
daily I'm constrained to be."

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,  
that saved a wretch like me;  
I once was lost, but now am found;  
was blind but now I see."

Yes, God's part in God's plan for saving man was the provision of the soul-cleansing blood of Christ, given by the grace, love, and mercy of God. After describing spiritual conditions before coming to Christ, Paul said, Ephesians 2:1-7, *"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 ye are saved)."* God makes the difference. What can wash away my sins? Thanks to the grace of God there is the blood of Christ. We must reach His blood. There is no other way.

\* \* \* \*

# ***The Twenty-Third Psalm***

A reading of this psalm is suggested at this point before continuing with the study. Possibly many readers can quote it from memory.

There are several reasons for choosing to discuss this particular psalm, and some of them are very personal and need not be specified. But this psalm has sung itself into millions of hearts. It comes from Deity through the writing and voice of the sweet singer of Israel, David, and brings forth words of peace, trust, rest, joy, guidance, comfort, and fellowship. The language is simple and plain, chaste and understandable. The notations are realistic, and it is certainly applicable to those who love the Lord even today.

In this psalm we have a picture of God in love with His people, having grace toward our needs, comfort for our sorrows, joy for our successes, and climaxed with the divine message of hope and expectation. Many griefs have been put to rest by its sweet assurances. Many sadnesses have been driven away and confidences restored, anxieties dispelled, bringing victory rather than defeat to the hearts of those who walk after God .

We may divide the psalm into three very logical divisions, each one showing something of the relationship between God and His child. (1) God is as a shepherd and we are His sheep. (2) God is as a guide and we are His followers. (3) God is as a host and we are His guests.

## **God as Shepherd**

*"The Lord is my shepherd."* We are as weak, foolish, thoughtless, unprotected sheep. God is our provider, preserver, and protector. Let us emphasize the word *"my."* While God is concerned with the masses of people, what a joy to know He also is concerned with me as an

individual. I am His and He is mine. There is this emphasis on the personal benefits our relationship sustains and are defined herein. Therefore, He supplies all my needs, physical and spiritual, for body, soul, mind, heart, spirit, all the various parts into which man might be divided and composed. As sheep look to their shepherd, so we look unto God.

*"I shall not want."* I may not even know what is best for me, but God does. He provides the rest, refreshment, nourishment, forgiveness, cleansing, guidance, fellowship, comfort, and security that I must have to live life properly and successfully. He makes me fit for service to Him and others and from Him comes the power to serve. I shall not lack anything that is necessary to the fulfillment of my purpose for existence. He will see to that.

One notable thing about His provisions is that they are great and abundant, but not an end in themselves. They are a means to an end. God created us for life, now and forever. In Christ we have the abundant life. Because of Him and what He provides we are prepared for the struggles as well as the successes along the road of life, even into the life beyond this one on earth. There are battles to be fought, works to be done, foes to be met, friends to be won. While we know not what a day may bring forth, because of Him there is nothing that will happen that God and I together cannot handle if only I will lean on Him. He restores, refreshes, and renews so we may enter into the challenges of each day with confidence and strength. How blessed we are to have such a Shepherd as our Lord! What a joy that we can be among His sheep!

### **God as Guide**

Nor shall we lack for guidance. He leads as our guide and we are His followers. Beside the still and calm waters we go. Even into the valley of the shadow of death. The inevitable looms before us with all of its unknowns. But just as He honors us, even in the presence of our enemies, and provides for us in the face of our foes, He supplies the blessings so abundant that our cup overflows with bounty from Him. He takes us by the

hand, as it were, to comfort and lead us through even the experience of death. We do not have to "cross Jordan alone." With Him the dread and fear evaporates. *"I will fear no evil for thou art with me."*

Man can follow one of two paths in life. He can go the way of wickedness or the way of righteousness. One brings destruction and the other brings fulfillment here and throughout eternity. It is so important where we are on our journey, and it may even be more important the direction we are traveling. But with God as our guide, we are led in the paths of righteousness.

So I go on not knowing  
I would not if I might;  
I'd rather walk with God in the dark  
Than to walk alone in the light;  
I had rather walk with him by faith  
Than to walk alone by sight.

It seems inevitable that some suffering must come. Some days the sun refuses to shine and sorrow forces itself into life. It may be by disease, disappointment, harassments, frustrations. Such things we cannot hope to bear alone. We lose our way. When the heart is breaking and the dark shadows gathering, and the tears flowing, what are we frail human beings to do? We take courage and strength from the fact that God is our guide. We shall be attended by goodness and mercy all the days of life.

Valleys that are dark to others are lighted by the Lord. This is the way it is for the Christian. We place our hand in His and travel on.

### **A Pointed Poem**

As we read the following poem, please notice the change of pronoun from "I" to "we" in the fourth stanza.

My plans were made, I thought my path all bright and clear,  
My heart with song o'erflowed, the world seemed full of cheer.  
My Lord I wished to serve, to take Him for my guide:  
To keep so close that I could feel Him by my side.  
And so I travelled on.

But suddenly, in skies so clear and full of light,  
The clouds fell thick and fast, the days seemed as the night;  
Instead of paths so clear and full of things so sweet,  
Rough things and thorns and stones seemed all about my feet.  
I scarce could travel on.

I bowed my head and wondered why this change should come,  
And murmured, "Lord, is this because of aught I've done?  
Has not the path been full enough of pain and care?  
Why should not my path again be changed from dark to fair?"  
But I still travelled on.

I listened - quiet and still, there came a voice:  
"This path is mine, not thine, I made the choice:  
Dear child, this service will be best for thee and me.  
If thou wilt simply trust, and leave the end to me."  
And so we travelled on.

### **God as Host**

Our psalm presents the beautiful home at the end of the journey. Life may well be beset with pitfalls, but such things will not be in the eternal home with the Lord. There God is host of the heavenly home. We will be His guests. The redeemed ones, who have been made a kingdom of priests here on earth, shall live with God in never-ending joy. It is only then that our understanding will be complete. We shall know that the toils of the road were nothing when we get to the end of the way. Romans 8:18, *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."*

The assurance of such a home serves a two-fold purpose. It is our goal because to such an existence we long to go. But it also provides us motivation and hope, giving meaning to life as we live here and now.

So we see these relationships of shepherd and sheep, guide and followers, host and guest. Such is our relationship with Almighty God. How can these things be? It is all made possible by the love of God for us, the sacrifice of Christ for us, and our surrender to Him. Paul said, Romans 5:10, *"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."*

By His blood that which would otherwise bar us from heaven is removed. By His life, death, and resurrection He says to us, "Do not be afraid of life, for I have lived. Do not be afraid of death, for I have died. Do not be afraid of eternity, for I hold in my hand the keys to all those mansions over there."

### **Two Men and the Psalm**

The story is told about a banquet attended by a great actor. His ability at expression was exquisite. He was asked to quote the twenty-third psalm. When he finished the audience burst into applause and shouted praise for his ability and performance.

There was also an old preacher present and he was politely asked to repeat the psalm also. He did, with utmost reverence and conviction. When he finished there was absolute silence.

One turned to another and asked why the difference between the reactions. He was told, "One knew the psalm. The other knew the Shepherd."

Is God your shepherd, your guide? Will He be your host? Why stumble along the way of life when you can have life and that more abundantly? Why suffer loss and total ruin when you can have the blissful home of the soul? Why struggle alone when this relationship with God is offered by God Himself? Make it a reality for you that you can say, "*The Lord is my shepherd.*"

\* \* \* \* \*

## ***The Presence of God***

Psalm 16:11. "*Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*"

There are several passages that could be cited to introduce this lesson. This passage is in the midst of a Messianic prophecy having to do with words cited by



Peter on Pentecost as referring to Christ. Our concern and emphasis is on the phrase, "*in thy presence*." That idea is often found in Scripture in various terms, such as thy presence, the presence of God, words that suggest fellowship, communication, association between God and mankind. However, the phrases do not always mean the same thing and there are differing senses in which there is the presence of God and man with each other. As we study these senses we shall learn much of the relationship between Deity and humanity, sometimes the presence of God being inescapable, and other times a matter of human choice.

### **God Always Present**

First, there is a sense in which God and man are in each other's presence always. Regardless of whether one is righteous or evil, all are in the presence of God because God is omnipresent, which means God is everywhere, with everyone, all the time. There is no time when one can totally escape being before God.

Hebrews 4:13, "*Neither is there any creature that is not manifest before his sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.*" Proverbs 15:3, "*The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.*" Luke 12:2, "*For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known.*" We must conclude, therefore, that all men, everywhere, at all times are in the presence of God. Their spiritual condition does not affect the presence of God in this sense. He is there.

### **God With His Children**

Second, even though God is with everyone, there is a special and unique sense in which God is with those who are His spiritual children. He maintains a warm and intimate association and fellowship with those who come to Him through His Son. As Jesus was about to ascend into heaven at the conclusion of His earthly service, having given the "great commission," He added, Matthew 28:20, "*Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.*" This was specifically said to the apostles, but inasmuch as the apostles did not live until

the end of the world, it obviously embraces all who believe on Him through their Word.

John wrote concerning the relationship of Deity and the Christian. First John 1:3, "*That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*" This teaching relies on the child of God being in the presence of God.

Psalms 140:13, "*The upright shall dwell in thy presence.*" This does not mean that the wicked escape His presence, as noted in the first sense, but that the upright have a relationship and association with the Father that does not adhere and pertain to those yet out of Christ.

### **With God in Worship**

Third, even with the Christian there is yet an additional sense in which God is present. God is present when we worship Him. Once a small lad was told by his father that they were "going to church," meaning they were going to the worship assembly. The little boy asked, "Who will be there?" The father responded, "I do not know who all might be there, but I know the Lord will be there. That is why we are going."

Psalms 100: 1,2, "*Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with singing.*" Worship is directed toward God and is in the presence of God. We should always be mindful when we are assembled for worship of the presence of God. Matthew 18:20, Jesus said, "*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*" When Christians come together according to the authority of Christ, He is spiritually present. The teaching of First Corinthians 10:16, referring to the observance of the Lord's Supper as a communion, brings this same presence to mind. At such a time there is an intimate dealing one with the other.

### **God With Us at Death**

Fourth, so complete is the Lord's presence that we do not escape Him even at death, if we have made provision for

Him to be with us. Psalm 139: 7-12 is a passage the reader is urged to consider (not written here for length) that underscores the presence of God in whatever circumstance His children might find themselves.

In the Twenty third Psalm we find the phrase, *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."* It is as the hymn suggests, "I won't have to cross Jordan alone."

### **God at Judgment**

Fifth. Hebrews 9:27 tells us, *"And it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment."* It is predetermined that we shall die, though when, where, how, and in what spiritual state we are not predestined. None shall escape physical death, the resurrection (John 6:28,29), the judgment, and eternity either in heaven or hell. Matthew 25:31-34,41 pictures the judgment scene as all nations are judged. Some shall hear words of reward while others shall hear words of eternal banishment. But the point we make here is that all shall hear one sentence or the other when we are before God.

Second Corinthians 5:10, *"For 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."* Some in the resurrection shall be raised to life and some to condemnation, but all shall be raised, judged, and shall pass into eternity.

### **Raised to be With God**

Sixth, there is yet another sense in which some shall be privileged to stand in the presence of the Lord. When Paul wrote the brethren in Thessalonica and answered their concerns about the resurrection and the welfare of the faithful who had already died before the Lord's return, he gave them inspired assurance that all would be well with the departed. First Thessalonians 4:13-18 is a favorite passage of man because of the hope and comfort it provides, especially at times when we are called to bid farewell in this life to faithful loved ones. Paul assured them that the dead in Christ shall rise

first, then we shall be raised and join them in the air, *"...and so shall we ever be with the Lord."* This refers to an eternal presence with God that begins when the redeemed enter into the never-ceasing glories of heaven. This will occur when the Lord Jesus returns.

In Second Thessalonians 1:9, in a passage where Paul describes the eternal punishment of the lost, the said banishment from the presence of the Lord characterized that punishment. *"Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."* Hell is an eternal separation from God while heaven is to be eternally in His presence.

### **Consider All Six**

The first and fifth senses of the presence of God are unavoidable regardless of our relationship with God. But the other four are determined by man's choice. It depends on what one does about Christ. Out of Christ one will not enjoy these four senses of the presence of God, but only in Christ where there is salvation (Acts 4:12; John 14:6; 2 Timothy 2:10).

\* \* \* \* \*

## ***The Doctrine of Romans 5: 1,2***

Romans 5:1,2. *"Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into the grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."*

This is a familiar and deeply loved teaching. We sing the song, Tell Me The Story of Jesus. One verse includes, "For those who know it best seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest." The doctrine or teaching of Christ is a source of delight, joy, comfort, and assurance to the child of God.

The book of Romans is a book devoted to revelation of the doctrine of Christ as written by the apostle Paul as he was guided by the Holy Spirit. If I were to give Romans a title I would choose the title, The System of Salvation. As much as any other one book of the Bible the book of Romans brings to light the fundamental matters of the way God saves man. I have written a commentary on the book of Romans and for this reason call my book The System of Salvation.

Chapter five includes many basic fundamentals of Christ's doctrine. These points are cherished, loved, held tenaciously, and taught by those who have committed themselves to Christ. Knowledge of them is essential to becoming, being, living, and growing as a Christian. With a great sense of joy we shall consider some of the truth as it is presented to us in these two verses.

There are four basic points made in these two verses. (1) Justification by faith; (2) peace with God through Christ; (3) the grace of God; (4) the hope of the Christian. Each is a sermon in itself, but our discussion shall be confined only to the first two points.

### **Justification**

What is meant by justification by faith? The word "justification" might be used in our language in three senses. (1) Suppose someone is accused of a crime. He may or may not be guilty. He may or may not suffer punishment for that of which he is accused. But upon proper investigation it is found that he is not guilty of the crime assigned to him. Therefore he is set free. The reason he has been set free is because he is justified in being free. He is not guilty. He has done no wrong.

(2) But suppose one is accused and the deed of which he is accused was actually committed. Suppose one may have killed his neighbor. Under the laws of our land it may at first appear he is deserving of punishment. But upon investigation it is learned that he acted from provocation. He acted in self-defense. Under such a case he is not confined nor punished, and because of the circumstances he is declared justified, even though he actually did the deed. It is deemed he was justified in it.

(3) But suppose one is accused, found to have actually done the evil deed, and there is no excuse for it. Out of malice and premeditation he acted wickedly. He therefore deserves punishment for his deed. But then he is set free anyway by the grace of the judge. He did not deserve it. He could not merit it. Yet, because another stepped forward and took the punishment in his stead, he goes free.

### **How It Is Used Here**

It is in this third way that the term "*justification*" is used in our text. Man sins against God by violating God's law (First John 3:4). He is guilty. There is no way for him to claim innocence because he has sinned. There is no reason or justification for man defying the will of God. It is totally unwarranted for him to do so. He deserves his punishment. Yet, one has come forward and received the penalty on his behalf, and he is declared innocent of guilt and set free. He has been justified of his sins and become the recipient of the benefits of the mercy and grace of God because Christ acted on his behalf.

### **What Do We Do?**

By what means does man take advantage of the justification that is provided him? He has access into the benefits of the grace of God by obedient faith. When Paul writes in Romans of faith he speaks of the faith that obeys (Romans 1:5; 16:26). John 1:12 teaches, "*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.*" "*Power to become*" means to have the right to become. One does not become a son of God simply by believing, unless you understand that it is an active, obedient faith. But having knowledge and being convinced, believing, enables one to have the power to become what he is not yet; namely, a son of God. It is by faith that one reaches the blessings offered by the grace of God.

Romans 1:17 teaches the "*just shall live by faith.*" Without faith there is no spiritual life. Hebrews 11:6 teaches we cannot please God without faith. Acts 15:9 reveals that Jews and Gentiles are both saved the same way, by faith. "*The gospel is God's power unto salvation to them that*

*believe.*" (Romans 1:16). If one is saved, he must have faith, the right kind of faith, the faith that obeys. James 2:24, "*Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*" The kind of works mentioned here are works of obedience, not merit. Faith alone, without obedience, saves nobody. The faith that saves is the faith that obeys. It is by works of obedience that faith is made perfect, whole, complete (James 2:22).

Our faith is not in men, creeds, the works of man's merit, plans devised by men, or any such thing. Our faith is in Christ the Son of God. By His power we are healed. We lean and depend on Him and show our faith by our obedience. Christ is the author of salvation to them that obey Him (Hebrew 5:9).

### **Meaning of "By Faith"**

Hebrews eleven includes the phrase "*by faith*" repeatedly, and give us a clear definition as to the kind of faith that brought those stalwart characters of old into favor with God. In each instance their faith caused them to do what God commanded. Acceptance of Him means acceptance of and compliance to His teaching. "*Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say.*" (Luke 6:46).

### **Peace With God**

Included in the blessings of justification is "*peace with God.*" The very word "peace" is appealing to say and hear. The thoughts produced are pleasant and comforting. How men everywhere long for peace, between nations, individuals, antagonistic factions, races, their fellowman, and peace within themselves. Our age is so beset with turmoil and aggravation. Except for those who are deranged, such things as strife, warfare, conflict, struggle, however necessary at times, are considered unpleasant. None in his right mind would deliberately seek conflict rather than peace.

There are different kinds of peace. What does it mean to have "*peace with God?*" We can be at peace with ourselves, within ourselves, between ourselves, and still not necessarily be at peace with God. The worst warfare that rages is the war man declares against God by

sinning. Sin darkens life with frustration, makes the striving of this world so empty, destroys dignity, wrecks the health of the body and mind as well as the immortal spirit. More than that, sin contaminates man so that he will be condemned to eternal punishment if sin is not removed by forgiveness which is only possible through the blood of Christ. Sin offers no benefit. *"The wages of sin is death."* (Romans 6:23).

### **Through Christ**

But there can be peace with God. Reconciliation is available. God has made such possible through Christ. Christ is our peace (Ephesians 2:14). We are reconciled by His cross (Ephesians 2:18). The gospel message is one of reconciliation (Second Corinthians 5:18,19). Jesus made reconciliation for the sins of the people (Hebrews 2:17).

Because of these truths we can easily see the necessity of coming to Christ. It is not God that must be reconciled to man, but man to God. God has not sinned nor caused any alienation between Himself and man. It is man that has sinned and man that must be reconciled. Man is the one to be forgiven. He must be changed or converted. Only through Christ can this become a reality for anyone. Peace with God through Christ speaks of the grand and glorious good news that the gospel of Christ declares.

Other lessons on the grace of God and hope of the Christian that are mentioned in our text deserve a place among our lessons, and have been discussed, and shall be again in the future. May God's blessings rest with us as we glorify Him because of the revelation in these verses.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Americans who are truly patriotic** might do well to forget such slogans as "Remember the Alamo," or "Remember Pearl Harbor," and think more seriously on the thought, **"Remember Sodom and Gomorrah."**

We may sing, **"God bless America,"** but seeing how so many in the nation defy God, we might also ask, **"Why should He?"**





## **Ethics of a Liberal**

A liberal openly blasted faithful brethren in the newspaper in Nashville, and I wrote him, asking him to answer relevant questions and substantiate the diabolical, judgmental, negative, and accusatory defamations he had thrown out. He wrote back, continuing the same as before, but no answers to anything. Having openly slandered brethren he wanted to get off in a corner and privately discuss it.

IS THERE NOBODY IN THE LIBERAL CAMP WILLING AND ABLE TO DEFEND WHAT THEY CONTEND AS OPENLY AS THEY BLAST BRETHREN? Their tactics are hit and hide, rip and run, smear, slander, and sneak away. I wonder if they are this unethical in everything they do, or only in their religion? At least, this liberal did not break my record of not yet having a liberal to give answer for anything they do. When you ask them, however, properly, you are "inflammatory." They divide the church, teach heresy, promote digression, and slander faithful brethren. JB

*The  
Last  
Word*

\* \* \* \* \*

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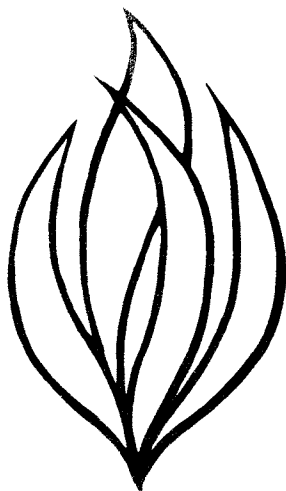
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# A Burning Fire



*"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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# **Can We Find Such A One As This?**

The subject is taken from a question asked by Pharaoh in the midst of the Biblically recorded event of Joseph's interpretations of Pharaoh's dreams. Pharaoh dreamed of seven lean cattle devouring seven fat cattle, but they grew no fatter. Also he saw seven lean ears of grain devour seven full ears of grain, but they grew no fatter. Joseph interpreted these dreams to prophesy the seven years of plenty that would come upon Egypt and that would be followed by seven years of famine.

Following that interpretation, Joseph gave some advice to Pharaoh for preserving supplies produced during the plentiful years to be used during the years of scarcity. He suggested the appointment of a man over the entire operation who was wise and discreet that could properly execute the work that had to be done. Upon receiving this advice Pharaoh asked, *"Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?"* (Genesis 41:38).

Pharaoh then determined that Joseph was just such a man, *"none so discreet and wise as thou art,"* and he appointed him over this matter. Doubtless Pharaoh made many appointments and decisions during his rule, but none was more excellent than his selection of Joseph, a man who was ruled and governed by the Word of God as directed by the Spirit, one who had the attitude and disposition to be a subject to Deity. Joseph was a person of exceptional character. Our lesson shall focus on character, not only of Joseph, but character that we would do well to imitate and strive to develop.

## **Character**

Character is both formed and displayed in times of adversity and prosperity. Joseph's life was a swing from one extreme situation to another. But in all circumstances, favorable and unfavorable, he formed and displayed a good character. One moment in life he

was a petted and pampered favorite son. But the next moment he found himself at the bottom of a pit, placed there by his brothers. Once he was in slavery, but later placed over the household of his master, Potiphar. One time he was in prison, but later became the man in charge of the prisoners. In prison he was a forgotten man, but soon rose to the rank of power second only to Pharoah himself. Let us see if we can agree with Pharoah that Joseph was the quality of character Pharoah thought him to be as seen in the events his life.

### **Obedience to Parents**

First, Joseph is an example of obedience to parents. We live in a time when many youths evidently think that disregarding, disrespecting, and disobeying parents is the "in" thing. We might admit that many parents are much to blame for the development of this attitude in their young, but that is another subject and worthy of consideration. God teaches young people to obey and respect their parents. Exodus 20:12, "*Honor thy father and thy mother...*" Paul wrote, Ephesians 6:1, "*Children obey your parents in the Lord...*" In Romans one Paul described the vile condition of Gentiles who had cast off God and he listed some twenty-three sins specifically which characterized them. In verse thirty he mentioned, "*disobedient to parents.*"

Joseph was instructed by his father to inquire of the welfare of his brothers as they tended his possessions. If ever a son might have balked at his father's directions, this could have been the time. Joseph's brothers were jealous of him, hated him, and obedience to his father would place Joseph at their mercy and disposal. But he answered his father, "*Here am I.*" (Genesis 37:13), meaning his willingness to go and do whatever his father asked of him.

There were many distressing events that followed in the life of Joseph because of what happened to him while obeying his father. But never do we read of Joseph expressing regret for obeying. Quite the contrary! Upon the death of Jacob Joseph led in paying honor and respect to his parent. Can we find such a one as this among us today?

## **When Mistreated**

Second, Joseph withstood the test of being mistreated by his own kin. What happened to him was cruel, unjust, and inhumane. He was sent from his home where he enjoyed security, love, and physical provision, but was overpowered, disclaimed, and totally rejected by his own flesh and blood. He must have suffered physically, mentally, and emotionally from this severe ordeal over the years. If ever a lad might have cause to be resentful and grow bitter, Joseph in the pit, in slavery, and in prison could be that circumstance.

Sometimes the worst kind of treatment comes from those you least expect it. It is sad when family members are vicious toward each other. What must the Heavenly Father think when there is strife among His children and brethren mistreat each other? People say things, act in bad ways, hold grudges against kin that they would never consider against others. No maltreatment hurts as bad as maltreatment from physical and spiritual kin.

But Joseph had the remarkable quality to not allow evil in others to destroy goodness within himself. Because others did wrong was not justification for him to do likewise. He knew and lived the teaching that Paul wrote in Romans 12:19-21 about overcoming evil with good.

## **Moral Purity**

Third, Joseph handled the challenge against his moral purity. Potiphar gave him charge over his household. Joseph's duties took him into the living quarters of Potiphar. While there he was repeatedly approached by Potiphar's wife to commit fornication with her. But he steadfastly refused by calling such a thing "*this great wickedness and sin against God.*" (Genesis 39:9). He withstood temptation and retained his moral purity.

Joseph learned that one way to escape the ravages of temptation is to put distance between yourself and temptation. He fled from her presence. He looked upon temptation, not so much as an opportunity to sin, but as an opportunity to resist evil and not sin. We need to learn that so that every time we encounter temptation

we can overcome it and grow stronger. This disposition toward temptation equips us to face the next temptation from a stronger position. Can we find such a one as this among us?

### **Ruined Reputation**

Fourth, Joseph knew how to withstand the trial of false accusations that shattered his reputation. Refusing to be immoral with Potiphar's wife did not deter her from later accusing Joseph to Potiphar of attempting to do the very thing he refused to do. The accusation was a vicious lie, unjust, and unfounded, but believed nonetheless. Once a trusted servant, he was now banished from the household and was cast into prison with his reputation destroyed by the wickedness of others.

There is, however, a difference between reputation and character. Reputation is what others may say and think of you. This can be good or bad. Of course, "*A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches...*" (Proverbs 22:1). But sinful people can and often do destroy reputations. One is not likely to have a good reputation if he has an evil character. He just might, undeserving though it be. But character is not what others think of you, but what God knows you to be. While others may destroy your reputation, only you can destroy your character. Joseph did not let the things that happened to him destroy the good character he possessed. Can we find such a one as this among us?

### **Forgotten**

Fifth, Joseph knew what it was to be forgotten. He must have wondered after being sold into Egypt why his father and brothers never came searching for him. We know why Jacob did not. He had been deceived by his other sons to think that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast. But Joseph did not know that. Of course, as honest and sincere as Jacob was in this belief, he was obviously wrong. We need to learn from this that just being honest and sincere about what we believe does not mean what we believe is true. This is one of man's most difficult lessons to learn. We see this problem everywhere in matters religious. So many are deceived this way.



Also consider the ingratitude of the butler whose dream Joseph interpreted while both were in prison. Upon the release of the butler back into the service of Pharaoh, Joseph specifically asked the butler to remember him before Pharaoh. After all, Joseph did not deserve to be where he was. But the Scripture tells us that the butler forgot about him. (Genesis 40:23).

It is one of the burdens of life to think oneself neglected, forgotten, and made to feel unwanted and unnecessary. Sometimes people do weird and tragic things to themselves and others in reaction to such treatment and feelings toward themselves.

But Joseph did not let even this painful experience destroy him. He obviously knew that God cared, and therefore he was never totally alone or forgotten. Who among us has this same confidence and disposition?

In all of the preceding events we have mentioned, Joseph suffered adversity and his character proved sterling and stalwart. He was later elevated to high honor, rank, power, position, prestige and wealth. Having faithfully endured so much abuse, how would he fare in his unexpected prosperity? Many have done well in times of difficulty, hardship, and strife, only to wreck their lives when confronted with the peculiar temptations of good fortune, power, authority, and the ability to have and do as one wishes. Would Joseph indulge himself with extravagance? Would Joseph turn against his former persecutors and reap his revenge upon them? What Joseph did is his crowning glory!

### **Like Christ**

In this last portion of Joseph's life we see a most Christlike quality in him even though he lived nearly twenty centuries before Christ. Some have described Joseph as likely being the most Christlike Old Testament character because of what he did once he gained power. Joseph possessed a forgiving spirit toward his offenders. He was willing to let the evil done against him pass by and be remembered no more. As for his brothers in particular, inasmuch as they gave evidence of genuine penitence and showed their regret for their

evil. Joseph returned evil with good. His brothers feared him at first, especially after the death of their father, Jacob. But Joseph told them, "*Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me: but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.*" (Genesis 50:19-21). There was not a grudge in his heart, nor resentment. He had no retaliatory spirit. Rather he was kind, forgiving, and considerate. Can we find such a one as this?

As we consider these noble qualities, let each of us ask of ourselves if we are the type of person "*in whom the Spirit of God is?*" As we partake and follow the teaching of the Spirit, we can be of noble character. This, however, is impossible unless and until we come to Christ, the perfect pattern for nobility of character.

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## **Our Unpossessed Ramoths**

### **NUMBER ONE**

First Kings 22:1-3. "*And they continued three years without war between Syria and Israel. And it came to pass in the third year that Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, came down to the king of Israel. And the king of Israel said unto his servants, Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria.*"

"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and they that dwell therein." (Psalm 24:1). We are not owners in the absolute sense of the word, but temporary stewards. We have use and control over many things only for a relatively short while. Eventually we must

give an account for the use, or possibly misuse, of that which has been entrusted to our care. First Corinthians 4:1, *"Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God."*

There is a restricted sense in which can say things are ours when making the distinction between that over which we are stewards and that over which others are stewards. Such an idea is expressed in Acts 5:1-4. When Peter was rebuking Ananias and Saphirra for their folly in lying to the Holy Spirit about what they had given, he said, *"While it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold was it not in thine own power?"*

Some things are ours, not because we have absolute ownership, but are ours in the sense that they are within our power to control. There are many things over which we have no personal control. The raging of the elements certainly falls into that category. We cannot control tornadoes, floods, earthquakes, etc. There are events of worldwide significance that are beyond the power of most people to shape, instigate, or regulate. But there are those things over which we have control, and we are accountable for using that power of control. First Corinthians 3:21, *"For all things are yours."* When God created man He said, Genesis 1:28, *"And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."* Collectively, the human family is rich! It has great power to control many things. We as individuals also have certain controls as well. Shall we not recognize our responsibility in using such power?

### **Unpossessed Possessions**

We have possessions that sometimes we do not possess. This may at first sound as if it is a contradiction, but this is the same idea that was expressed in our text. There was this area called Ramoth that rightly belonged to Israel. As the king of Israel said, *"It is ours."* But the problem was that it had fallen under the occupation and control of the king of Syria. Ramoth was a possession that they did not actually possess.

Obadiah seventeen reads, "*And the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions.*" It is rather strange to speak of possessing in the future tense what is already called a possession. The explanation is that they had possessions that they did not possess. Something that should have been under their control was not under their control even though such was intended. Things we should control are not always controlled.

The Lord has given man power that man sometimes refuses to use. One instance of this possibility is found in John 1:12, "*But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.*" To believe is not all that is necessary to become a son of God. To believe gives one "*power to become,*" the right to become a son of God. Sometimes this passage is abused to try to prop up the false doctrine of salvation by faith alone. It teaches just the opposite of that and refutes that doctrine. If one believes, in the sense of mere mental assent of the truth, but does not act in obedience to the command of truth, he fails to use the power that his belief offers him. His faith brings him to the place where he knows he can and ought obey. If he does, he rightly uses that power. If he does not obey, then he fails to use the power he has.

### **Unused Power**

We are often not powerful and it is not because the Lord has failed us, but because we do not use the power offered us. Man has the power to come to Christ, but all will not come. We can become more than conquerors through Christ, but many will never be spiritually victorious and will suffer eternal defeat because they will not utilize the power that is within their grasp.

We all have, from the inspired Word, "*all things that pertain to life and godliness.*" (Second Peter 1:3). But our lives are not always godly. We have freedom from the bondage of sin through the truth (John 8:32), but we are not always free from sin (First John 1:8,10). Man is offered peace with God (Romans 5:1), but we are not all at peace with God. Salvation has been brought to all (Luke 19:10), but not all are saved. Christ is at the door of every heart (Revelation 3:20), but not every heart is

opened to Him. We have our unpossessed possessions, our own Ramoths, blessings that are ours for the taking, but which we have not taken; matters over which we can and should exercise control, but have not used that power and control. Let us speak in two lessons of some such things, considering only one in the first study.

### **Our Children**

Our children are within our power. This may not be true of all, however, because some children have grown to maturity and are now responsible for themselves. There comes that time when parents can no longer be held responsible for the lives of their children. Also, some children are not within the power of their parents because parents have lost control by not exercising their power and authority when they could. But it should be true of children who are still under the guidance and oversight of their parents that the parents have power over them.

Genesis 4:1. Eve said concerning the birth of her son, Cain, *"I have gotten a man from the Lord."* Possibly many parents have not recognized that our children are from the Lord and entrusted to us. Psalm 127:3, *"...children are an heritage of the Lord, and fruit of the womb is his reward."* Hannah said of Samuel, First Samuel 1:27,28, *"For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him. Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord. And he worshipped the Lord there"*

Our children are within our power to direct, train, shape, and mold as we choose. Every parent ought to be jealous of this power and right as well as sensitive to this responsibility. We should not allow the state, schools, friends, the devil, nor his agents usurp that authority that we have concerning our children. Neither should we neglect exercising this authority ourselves. Psalm 127:4, our children *"are as arrows in the hand of a mighty man."* We can determine more than anyone else in the world, other than the children themselves, their direction of life. The old adage says, "As the twig is bent, the tree will grow." It is not easy, sometimes impossible.

to straighten the crook in a full-grown oak that grew in such fashion because of what happened to it when it was but a sapling.

Our children are saying to us as the Gibeonites said to Joshua, Joshua 9:25, "*And now, behold, we are in thine hand: as it seemeth good and right unto thee to do unto us, do.*" The tragedy of the family of Eli was, First Samuel 3:13, "*For I have told him that I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not.*"

### **A Parent's Prayer**

Before the birth of Samson, his father "*entreated the Lord and said, O Lord, ...teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.*" (Judges 13:8). Should not this be the prayer of every prospective father and mother? What a noble and honorable request! Again, verse twelve, "*And Manoah said, Not let thy word come to pass. How shall we order this child, and how shall we do unto him?*" If only parents would be this concerned about their children that they would seek the will of the Lord regarding the upbringing of their offspring!

The responsibility of a child should bring the parent closer to God because we cannot properly rear our children apart from God. Is it not too obvious that many young people are reaching physical maturity without having God before them? Has your child caused you to seek God's help and be more dependent on Him? Have you asked, as Bible characters asked, "*What shall I do for my son?*" (Second Samuel 10:2). "*How shall I order the child?*" (Judges 13:8). "*Is the young man safe?*" (Second Samuel 18:29). "*Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way?*" (Psalm 119:9).

Proverbs 22:6, "*Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*" (Ephesians 6:4, "*And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*" First Timothy 5:8, "*But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than and infidel.*"

## Parental Duty

These passages bind upon the parents the duty not only to supply the material provisions, but the spiritual guidance and training of the child. The upbringing and education of the child is the responsibility of the home. Schools are only to assist the homes, not replace the home, nor usurp the home. The heart of education is the education of the heart. Genesis 18:19, it is said of Abraham, *"For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him."* Can this be said of us and our handling of our children?

What a charge is given to parents in Deuteronomy 32:46. *"Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law."*

Are our children safe, spiritually safe in their environment, habits they are forming, language they are hearing and using, values they are making, attention they are getting, training they are receiving? It is unthinkable that our children will listen to verbal advice but ignore the example we set before them in our lives. We cannot lift our children unless we stand on higher ground.

Psalms 78:1-8, a text too lengthy to include here but which you are urged to pause and read, gives emphasis to our theme. The things of God must not be hidden from our children. The generation to come must be shown the praises, works, and testimonies of the Lord. Why? So the generation yet to come might know these things, set their hearts in God, and keep His commandments, that they might live successfully here on this earth, and live eternally with God in the life beyond this one.

Our children are within our power. They are our possession. But do we possess them? Are we controlling them? What kind of stewards are we being regarding them? Shall we be still and allow them to fall into or remain in the hands of Satan? There are many matters

about which we must be diligent. Is there anything that is more sobering and demanding, insistent and urgent, than this of which we have spoken regarding our own children?

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# ***Our Unpossessed Ramoths***

## **NUMBER TWO**

Our text is First Kings 22:1-3. It may prove useful to the reader to refer to the first lesson and reread the brief comments made that shows the connection of the text to the points we are making. There are those things that, in one sense, are ours, but yet, are not ours because we fail to use the power and control that is granted us. All is God's and in a real and true sense we are but stewards. But still we have power over things, and we shall give an account of the use, or misuse, even the failure to use, that power and ability to control. Too often we be as the king of Israel said concerning a territory called Ramoth that he knew belonged to Israel but had been taken by Syria. *"Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take them not out of the hands of the king of Syria."*

Our talents, regardless of how tremendous or minimal they are, are within our power. Every person has some talents, usually far more than they realize. None of us are empty-handed in this respect. We are speaking of talents other than the more obvious ones, such as money. We have the talent of energy, time, mental and physical capacity for activity. We do not all have the same capacities and abilities, or even have what we have



to the same degree. It is good that it is that way so that every need might be met.

A false doctrine that is now making its way into the distorted thinking of those of the liberal bent is that we have spiritual gifts today. When the Bible speaks of spiritual gifts it speaks of miraculous power, not just talents and abilities. Spiritual gifts had a purpose and that purpose has been accomplished in the confirmation of the Word (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3,4). To claim spiritual gifts today is false. To call our natural or developed talents spiritual gifts is to fail to speak as the oracles of God. Spiritual gifts were to cease (First Corinthians 13). Why cannot people be content to use Biblical concepts in a Biblical way, rather than redefine words so fit their false doctrines?

When Paul wrote his brethren in Corinth, First Corinthians 12:13-27, he emphasized how each has his or her role, none could discount the usefulness and necessity of the other, but that all working together was what was needful to make the body whole. A pint jar cannot contain what quart jar can, but neither is it expected to do so. But it is expected to hold a pint.

Two bear hunters were hunting. One was a huge strong man. The other was a rather small man, certainly in relation to the first. The small man said, "If I was as big as you, I would find the biggest bear in the woods and drag him in." The larger man responded, "There are some little bears in the woods, too." We too often expect a great amount from others whom we perceive to be multi-talented, but do we always realize what talents we have and how God expects us to use them, producing the best we can with what we have?

### **Judgment Scene**

Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus pictures the judgment scene. In this presentation we see how reward was made according to the relationship of opportunity and effort made. Opportunities are not always the same. But when each did as he could with what he had, and did it to the best of his ability, he was rewarded and the master was pleased. The same words are used to give praise to the

two talent man as the five talent man because they, like it is said of the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus, Mark 14:8. *"She hath done what she could."*

Why was the one talent man rebuked? Not too very long ago I heard of a sermon preached by one who claims to be a gospel preacher wrest and twist this passage to contend that churches ought to take contributions and invest them and allow them to accumulate, then form "foundations" by which the work of the church would be supported. Does any intelligent person really believe this is what the Lord is teaching? How far astray from truth some "clergymen" go! The Lord is teaching that the one talent man, although he did not double his money as the others, was not condemned because of the failure to invest the talent. He was condemned because he did nothing. He did not do what he could, not even the least thing. He hid his talent for fear. He was one who certainly did not possess his possessions. But Jesus is not teaching the church to make investments in order to provide financial support for the work of the church. That is to be accomplished by liberal, cheerful, free-will giving as determined by how one prospers and plans. Some have more interest in interest than an interest in saving souls.

### **Excuses**

Too many never attempt to do what they actually could do and do very well because they excuse themselves. "I don't do as good as somebody else. Please have me excused." That you may not do as well as some other in some efforts is not the point. You may not be expected by the Lord to do as well and you may not have talents others possess. But you need to possess what talents you have. Whatever you do there will be many others who may very well do better. But what of that? There would be only one preacher of the gospel in the world if all preachers took the attitude that they would not preach because somebody can do a better job than they.

Some complain, "Well, I have never done that before." There was a time when there was nothing you had done before. If you have not done it before, how can you know

you cannot do it? The "right angle" approach to doing anything good is the "try-angle."

"But I may fail!" Right you are! You may do just that. But you may succeed. The only sure failure is to not try. If you try and do not accomplish all which you have set before you, you have a measure of success just because you tried. Second Corinthians 8:12, Paul said, *"For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not."* Someone has said, "If you are not satisfied with your lot in life, why not build a service station on it?" Yes, we should put our lives to use because it is not as important what life has brought to you as it is what you bring to life. Do not fail to possess your possessions!

### **A Debtor**

Romans 1:14-16, *"I am a debtor both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."*

Paul said he was debtor. He once was a persecutor, blasphemer, one who made havoc of the church, lost, but one of good conscience (Acts 23:1; 26:9). But later, in Christ, as one of the saved, blessed of God, and a recipient of the benefits of God's mercy, he felt obligated to let God and others know of his gratitude, and he knew his responsibility to tell others of salvation through Christ whether they be Greek, Barbarian, Jew, wise, or unwise. He was a debtor to others because of the blessing he had received.

Paul said he was ready. How ready was Paul? *"So, as much as in me is..."* He was as ready as his power and ability would permit. Nothing was of greater concern to Paul than preaching the gospel. He allowed no hindrance, obstacle, or enemy, regardless of how painful or powerful, how difficult or taxing upon him, to come between him and doing his spiritual duty to others.

Neither was Paul ashamed. He was not ashamed of the gospel, even though there were many who mocked and

ridiculed what he preached. He was not ashamed of the power of God, even though many did not even believe God existed. He was not ashamed to use what power and possessions he had in working for the Lord. His sense of indebtedness forced him to use his talents for the salvation of others. He learned to possess his possession, and he utilized them to the fullest.

### **An Equal Talent**

One talent we all have in equal amounts is the talent of time. It has been said that time is the stuff of which life is made. Time is opportunity. Twice Paul exhorted us to redeem the time (Ephesians 5:16; Colossians 4:5). By this he meant we should make the best use of it, not waste it, but make every minute "sixty seconds worth of distance run," as Kipling wrote in the poem, "If."

So often we are inclined to say, "I just do not have the time." This does not always reflect a lack of ability, desire, interest, or concern. We are surely honest at times in thinking we do not have the time to do what we may have been asked to do or want to do. But do we use this as an excuse to keep from doing what we really could do? It is so often heard when the call goes forth for personal work, visitation, even attending worship services regularly, caring for the less fortunate, etc.

But the fact remains that God gave us these duties, and He gives each of us the same number of minutes and hours in a day. Rather than saying we do not have the time, would it not be more accurate to say that we have not arranged our time to include some things? We do have to establish priorities. But let us have as our priority those things that God would want us to do. There are many things clamoring for our time. But we must seek His kingdom and righteousness first (Matthew 6:33). This is the Lord's command.

### **Priorities**

We can get ourselves so busy with various temporal duties, even matters that are not wicked in themselves, that we leave undone the more serious and sacred duties that God has assigned His children. Does what God want

occupy prime importance with us? Are we inclined to relegate His work into a second or third place in life? Can it be true that we are so overtaken in "busy-ness" that we neglect the Lord's business? If we exhaust our energies, time, abilities, and talents to the point we cannot do the special labors expected of the Christian? Are we possessing our Ramoths? Are we using the power we have? Are we controlling those things given us to control? Time is power. We possess it every day we live. But do we really possess it?

### **Examples**

There are many examples of using talents recorded in the Bible. God asked Moses what he had in his hand. It was a shepherd's staff, just another common rod as shepherds used until Moses was willing to use it as God directed.

The lad who had a small lunch of five loaves and two fishes did not have much. But when he allowed the Master to use it, it was enough to feed the five thousand with some left.

Hannah had a son that she gave to the Lord. Noah could not covert the world, but he did save his own family. Will we do as much? Rahab exercised herself in saving her household even as she saved the lives of the Jewish spies. She possessed her Ramoths. David could not properly use the warrior's armor offered him by Saul when he went to face Goliath, but he used his sling effectively. Paul told Timothy to not neglect the gift in him (First Timothy 4:14).

A closed hand cannot receive a gift or a blessing. Let us open our hands and our eyes and see what God has placed in our possession and so use these possessions, such as our children, our time, all of our talents, to serve the Lord and bring glory to His name.

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**When and if you change your address, please advise us, or we must discontinue sending you our booklet.**

# ***What About the Babies?***

Few subjects capture the interest and attention of people more than lessons that involve our babies. We are all concerned about them, physically and spiritually. Our lesson is primarily centered on their spiritual state, welfare, and relationship to God.

The question is often asked, "What about the soul of a baby? If a baby dies, is he lost or saved? When does one become personally responsible to God?" A significant segment of the religious world says a baby is born in sin, and if it dies the baby is damned forever. They contend a baby is born totally depraved. This idea flows from the influence of Augustine and Calvin and their doctrines. It does not come from the Bible. The doctrine of total depravity says in Adam's fall we all sinned and we are all guilty of sin when we are born, totally depraved, helpless and hopeless to do anything about our spiritual condition until there is a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon us. We are supposed to have inherited the guilt of the sins of our forefathers and are condemned because of it.

The natural sequence to such a doctrine is either the baby bound for hell or we must do something for the baby since he obviously cannot do anything for himself. That which was devised to be done for the infant was called infant baptism. Actually, what was done was not a baptism but a sprinkling of water on the child which was erroneously called baptism. Baptism is immersion, not sprinkling. There is not a word in the Bible that authorizes such a practice upon infants.

## **None Of It Is Biblical**

The fact is the Scriptures do not support the practice of infant sprinkling, infant baptism, the doctrine of total depravity at birth, inherited guilt of the original sin of Adam and Eve, or inheritance of the sins of forefathers.

Romans 5:12 is sometimes cited to support these false doctrines, but let us consider it. " *Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men...*" I have deliberately omitted for the moment the last phrase of the verse. The passage teaches that sin entered the world through the sin of our first parents, and the consequence of sin came with it, which is death. It also teaches that death has passed upon all. One consequence of the sin in the Garden of Eden which all must suffer is that all must die. This speaks of physical death.

The portion of the verse omitted is now to be studied. " *For that all have sinned.*" There is physical death and there is spiritual death. Both entered the world because of the sin. Physical death will come to all (Hebrews 9:27). But spiritual death is because " *all have sinned.*" (Romans 3:23), not because of Adam's sin. The wages of sin is spiritual death (Romans 6:23). Whether one sins or not, he will die physically. But one must be guilty of sin to die spiritually.

People often suffer various consequences of the sins of others. Wives and children suffer because of a husband and father who is a drunkard. But they are not guilty of his sins.

### **Individual Guilt**

People become guilty of sin when they transgress the law of God. Sin is transgression (First John 3:4). Spiritual death is due to one's own sins. We may influence others and lead them to sin, but we are not guilty of their sins. Others may influence me to sin, provoke me and tempt me to sin, but they are only guilty of provoking and tempting. They are not guilty of the sin which I commit. Sin entered the world through Adam, but nobody except Adam is guilty of Adam's sin.

Romans 5:12, like Romans 3:23, explains why we die spiritually. The principle is forcefully stated in Ezekiel 18:20. " *The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall*

*be upon him.*" If the doctrine of the inheritance of Adam's sin was true, it could not be said the soul that sins shall die. The soul would already be dead, having been dead from birth.

Paul wrote, *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."* (Second Corinthians 5:10). *"And behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be."* (Revelation 21:12). These last two passages emphasize personal responsibility and accountability for what each one does, not for what somebody else has done. Sin is a transgression of God's law, and the child has transgressed nothing but the threshold of life.

Not until one is responsible and has personally violated God's law is he guilty of sin. Until then he has no need of being saved because he is not lost, but safe. By his own sins he becomes separated from God, but not until then.

### **Modern Version Perversion**

Another passage that is often misapplied to support the false doctrine of inherited sin is Psalm 51:5. *"I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me."* What does the passage actually say? It does not say David was conceived sinfully. It does not say he was personally sinful when he was born. It says sin was all around him. Possibly his mother was guilty of sin when he was conceived, not that she was sinful in conceiving. There is no support whatever for the idea that David was born guilty of sin. The one in sin in this passage is not the child, but either the mother or the world into which he was born.

The Living Bible, which is nothing more reliable than a distorted human paraphrase, has rewritten the passage and totally perverted it. The LB reads, *"But I was born a sinner, yes, from the moment my mother conceived me."* The New International Version teaches this same Calvinistic doctrine, as do many of the so-called modern versions. Let us always remember these books were produced for profit by people who do not consider the



Bible to be God's verbally inspired Word, and they have simply injected their denominational creeds into the text as if they belonged.

### **The Truth About Children**

Let us consider an array of passages and learn what the Bible does say about the spiritual condition of children. *"And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them, and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily, I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein. And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them and blessed them."* (Mark 10:13-16). Similar accounts are found in Matthew 19:13-15 and Luke 18:15-17. The disciples evidently considered Jesus too busy to be bothered with the children. But Jesus used them to teach concerning the nature of those who would make up His kingdom. *"Of such is the kingdom of God."* Again, *"Except ye be converted and become as little children."* Unless He meant the kingdom would be composed of those of a childlike nature, He was teaching that nobody but children would be in the kingdom, and that is absurd. People must be **as** children, pure, innocent, trusting, dependent, obedient. If children are in sin, guilty of sin, lost, doomed, damned, and totally depraved, why would Christ want people to be like children? Is the kingdom of God composed of those who are condemned?

### **God's Fault?**

To teach that babies are born in sin because they have inherited the sinful spirit of their parents is a bad reflection on God. Babies inherit physical characteristics from their parents, but not their spirits. We receive our spirits from God. Hebrews 12:9 calls God the *"Father of spirits."* If the baby's spirit is depraved, it would be because God is depraved. This is blasphemy! We may not be able to prove to the satisfaction of all just when the spirit takes abode in the human body (the Bible teaches it is at conception, and this is why abortion is murder), but we do know from Whom it

comes without any possibility of question. Unless God is depraved and guilty of sin, the spirit of the child is sinless and without guilt of sin.

### **Infant Baptism**

What about infant baptism? First, let us insist that the burden of proof for this practice rests with those who advocate it. But we would answer, since the child is sinless, it is senseless, useless, and an unauthorized religious human exercise. There is not the first word in the Bible that teaches it. To go beyond the authority of God and what is written is forbidden (Colossians 3:17; Second John 9-11; First Corinthians 4:6). Again, we must note that what is practiced is not infant baptism, but infant sprinkling. It remains for those who do it to find it in the Bible.

"But what about Acts ten and sixteen where we read of the household of Cornelius and Lydia being baptized? Surely, there must have been children in those families." To assume children were in those families is nothing more than an unsubstantiated assumption. Even if children were in those families, we shall show they would not have been proper subjects and candidates for baptism. Nobody can even prove children existed, or if they existed that they were present.

Those present heard Peter preach and believed what they heard (Acts 15:9). Infants could not comprehend what was preached nor have the capacity to believe or disbelieve either way. In Acts sixteen, those baptized were the women who had come to the river's side for prayer and heard the teaching of Paul. They "*attended*" to the things spoken, which means they understood what was taught and acted accordingly. The text says women, not women and children. Children would not be capable of doing what those who heard the word did. Furthermore, you would have to assume that the woman, Lydia, was married, and if married she had children, and if she had children they were present, and that if present they were infants, and if infants they were baptized. What a long list of unsupported assumptions from which to concoct as senseless doctrine!

## **Methodists Changed the Discipline**

It is interesting to note that the Methodist Discipline of a few years back contended for the necessity of infant sprinkling (they called is baptism) because children were depraved. But now they contend for it because children belong to God, and need to be dedicated to God. Such is the shift in human doctrines, which only proves such doctrines have no Biblical basis.

If babies are lost there would be something in Scripture telling us that, and informing us what must be done for them since they can do nothing for themselves in this matter. After all, it was the mission of Christ to seek and save the lost. What is to be done about the babies if they are lost? Why did God say nothing about it? The Scriptures furnish us unto every good work (Second Timothy 3:16,17), but it furnishes us nothing about the lost condition of babies and what to do about it.

There is no Biblical reason to be concerned about the spiritual welfare of babies. David said when his infant son died, *"But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."* (Second Samuel 12:23). Why should David want to go to him if the infant was doomed and damned? Rather than being concerned about babies if they should die, we should be more concerned if they live!

## **When Is One Accountable?**

When does one become accountable before God, and responsible for his relationship with God? Obviously, there does come such a time because we shall be judged. The Bible gives no specific chronological age or specified birthday celebration. It varies with each individual because it is a matter of capacity to know and understand and respond. We can say that generally such ability comes between the age of eight to fourteen. Some may never reach accountability due to mental incapacity, but that is an exception. To teach that we become accountable at a certain age, like the age of twelve because Jesus went to the temple at twelve, is to confuse Jewish law with reality under the new covenant.

Accountability depends upon one's mental capacity to know right from wrong, and one's ability to understand his relationship with God, and comprehend his duty toward God. To obey God one must do so "*from the heart*" (Romans 6:16-18). That demands a mental grasp of one's spiritual conditions and the relevance of the terms of pardon. To be able to meet the Lord's conditions for salvation one must be able to be taught, able to learn, able to understand, able to believe, repent, confess his faith, and be baptized for the remission of sins. One must be able to make such decisions from the heart and his actions based on convictions. Until then, he is yet incapable to respond to what will eventually become his duty if he lives.

Certainly it behooves each parent and those who are teaching the young to be attentive to each child that they may receive instruction and be led in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, so they might know and understand what the will of the Lord is, and being then capable of doing it, to do it.

\* \* \* \* \*

### **The Future of *A Burning Fire***

One never can speak with absolute confidence what will take place in the course of time, even if time continues.. But we make plans and have expectations. With this issue we have successfully produced thirteen volumes, twelve issues each, of ***A Burning Fire***.

Present plans call for continued publications for at least four more years. At that milepost, we should just about have exhausted the material presently intended to be included, and shall reconsider things then.

Who knows what the future may hold? Life, health, finances, equipment, time, so many circumstances have a bearing on these things. But right now, things are **GO'** JWE



## **Faithful For Their Time**

A few weeks ago I was invited to speak to brothers and sisters in Christ who are senior citizens. It was a delightful evening with a meal and association. I wondered what would be encouraging to these good people. From their point of view so many things for which they have stood and fought are being buried beneath the rubbish of liberalism, politically, morally, religiously, educationally, and just about every other way. That is discouraging. But those good people are not the cause of this despicable departure from decency and truth. They have been faithful to the Lord and His Word and deserve praise. So praise them I did, and gave them words to inspire them to stay that way. JB

# *The Last Word*

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