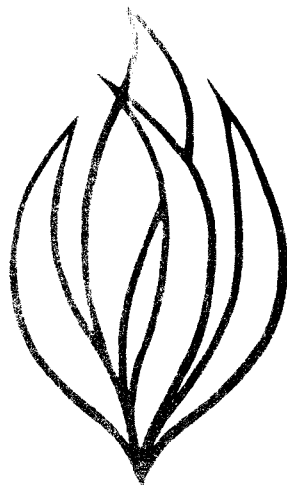


A Burning Fire



*"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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THIS ISSUE

Some Questions and Answers

It Remains Unchanged

BC

Questions and Answers

This issue of **A Burning Fire** will be devoted to discussing selected questions and answers on a variety of Biblical subjects. For a period of over twelve years in Chattanooga, Tennessee, Jacksonville, Alabama, and Jackson Tennessee I had the opportunity to serve on a panel on television alongside brethren of those areas where we dealt with questions that were submitted by the viewing audience, and we gave them Biblical answers. You can imagine the wide range of topics that would come before us. But there were certain questions that were submitted time and time and time again. This reflected a special interest that people had on these particular themes, and we would deal with them whenever they arose.

I compiled from the long list of questions that were submitted a number that were among those most often asked over this span of time. Whether or not the questions are those of greatest importance to the soul is not mine to determine. But they are questions for which people most often wanted to hear Bible answers. A study of them is still relevant and useful. We may extend this into a portion of the next edition. JWB

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DO YOU THINK YOUR PEOPLE ARE THE ONLY ONES GOING TO HEAVEN?

The very first thing we must determine is what we shall use as our authority. What man thinks is not the authority whether it be me, you, or anybody else that lives or has ever lived, unless you have reference to inspired men. The Word of God is the authority. Once that is clearly settled in our mind we shall be able to get

off this focus on what people think and learn what God teaches.

The way to heaven is straight and narrow (Matthew 7:13,14). Those who obey God will be saved (Hebrews 5:9), and those who don't, won't (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9). Nobody can change that. Why try? When the Lord commands and man obeys, man shall be blessed. If man refuses to obey, can we say he shall be blessed anyway?

Some people like to put others in the area they call "judging other people." When you believe what God says and say what God says, you are not judging other people. You are simply relating what God has said, even His judgments. We need to think more seriously about not believing what God says and taking upon ourselves to say something different. If you refuse to believe and teach what God says you are judging God's Word to be wrong and undeserving of being accepted. The only one God says will be saved are those who believe and obey what He says they must believe and obey.

When people have obeyed the conditions of the gospel as the Bible teaches, and continue faithful, they shall be saved. Salvation is not in just any religion, but only in Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Neither do we read of salvation in denominations because the Bible says nothing authorizing denominations. How can we just claim that does not matter? We must accept God's judgments and His Word teaches that those who believe and obey Him will be saved. This is what we have preached all our preaching life.

DOES THE CHURCH OF CHRIST BELIEVE IN TITHING?

It is impossible to generalize and say what all members of the church believe on anything. People are at various stages of growth, and some have much more to learn than others. But like our first question, what members believe is not what determines right and wrong. The church is not to make doctrine, nor alter the doctrine of Christ, but to proclaim it (First Timothy 3:15). Faithful

brethren are not committed to what some erroneously call "Church of Christ doctrine." Such does not exist.

Tithing refers to ten per cent. This was commanded of the Jews under the law of Moses. In fact, they gave more than one tithe. As we study the Biblical subject of giving we get the impression that this was practiced as far back as the time when Abraham gave to Melchizedek.

Just when man began giving a tithe is irrelevant because we live under the law of Christ, not that of Moses or the Patriarchs. There being no specific percentage taught in the new covenant of Christ, we teach no set percentage. There are other qualifications to acceptable giving, however (First Corinthians 16:1,2; Second Corinthians 9:6,7; the principle of Proverbs 3:9, and others).

Giving is an expression of love, not a matter of percentage. The doctrine of Christ neither requires nor restricts giving to any certain percent.

WHY DO YOU NOT HAVE MUSIC IN YOUR CHURCH?

First, we have no church of our own making, but are members of the Lord's church. Second, we do have music; the kind the Bible authorizes which is singing. We are content with the "*oracles of God*" and know man should not add to nor take from what God has said. What we do is by Christ's authority (Colossians 3:17), something nobody that plays instruments in worship can say truthfully. There simply is no authority for them in the will of Jesus Christ. If one thinks so, find the passage.

The refusal to use these instruments is not because we think instruments are sinful in themselves, nor because we cannot afford them, nor because we dislike instrumental music per se. It is not just to be different. It is a matter of sincere determination to abide in the doctrine of Christ (Second John 9).

WHAT IS THE BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT?

There is much controversy over this question, but I shall try to state my convictions as plainly as possible. While some contend this sin is attributing the miracles of Christ to the devil rather than divine power, and we agree this would be blasphemy, speaking against Deity, yet, some of the ones who did this very thing had the gospel preached to them that they might be saved. Why preach to them if they could not be forgiven?

Others say it is the rejection of the gospel until death overtakes them. True, there is no second chance (Second Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27). One who is not forgiven in this life cannot expect forgiveness after death. To reject the gospel is to reject the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 16:13). But this rejection, if it be the sin under consideration, would not be committed until death. But this sin we are considering can be committed in this life, so we do not accept this explanation.

It is my conviction that so long as one stands in rejection of the gospel he cannot be forgiven because the gospel is the only way of salvation. The passage that mentions the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit indicates this sin is committed in this life. Blasphemy literally means to speak against. Surely, one does this when he rejects the gospel.

No sin is unforgiveable if the conditions of forgiveness are met. No sin is forgiveable until the terms of forgiveness are met. So long as one lives in defiance, rebellion, disobedience of the gospel, he cannot be forgiven, and such a one is in danger of damnation. The Holy Spirit has given sufficient evidence for us to accept the gospel. If we do not, but speak by our life and word against His will, we sin in such fashion that seals our doom.

While there is some credibility in each position, it is the last one that I believe has by far the better and more consistent part. I am equally confident that not all will agree with me. However, whether one knows what the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is or not will not determine his salvation. Whether one believes and obeys the gospel will determine salvation. Better we concentrate on the more important, don't you think?

WHEN DID GOD CHANGE THE SABBATH?

Some questions assume things that have never been proven. As for God changing the Sabbath, He never did. He did change the necessity to observe it as taught in the law of Moses.

The Sabbath is and always has been the seventh day of the week, not Sunday. Sunday is not the "Christian Sabbath."

Some say Constantine changed the day of worship from the Sabbath to Sunday. This is false. It is true that Christ observed the Sabbath because He lived subject to the law of Moses as a Jew (Galatians 4:4). But never did He bind this observance on the church. In fact, Christians are warned against binding the Sabbaths (Galatians 4:9-11; Colossians 2:16,17).

Many times after the church began the apostles entered the synagogues on the Sabbath, but not to engage in Jewish worship, but to teach. The old law was nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14), including the Ten Commandments, which is evident from Romans 7:1-4 where the sin of coveting, the tenth commandment, is specifically mentioned as that from which we are delivered.

The law of Moses was fulfilled by Christ (Matthew 5:17,18), a law given only to Jews (Nehemiah 9:13,14; Deuteronomy 5:1-3). The early Christians assembled on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; First Corinthians 16:1,2). Constantine, instead of making the first day of the week the day of assembly, recognized it as the day the Christians assembled, and in order to favor them assigned it to be a legal holiday.

Actually, we do not observe a day, anyway. We remember Christ in worship on the first day of the week. Even those who contend for Sabbath keeping now do not follow the law regarding it which forbids cooking, travel, demands rest, and other restrictions. These things are ignored by Sabbath observers. We are led by the truth of Christ, not the law of Moses (John 1:17; 8:32; Galatians 3:11).

WHERE DID CAIN GET HIS WIFE?

It has always seemed strange to me that this question is asked over and over. It is usually provoked by skepticism and those who question the truthfulness of Scripture. Their idea is that since Adam and Eve were the first couple, having two sons, there could not have been anybody for Cain to marry. The Scripture does not tell us how long after the creation before Cain married. Furthermore, Scripture tells us (Genesis 5:4) that Adam and Eve begat sons and daughters. It is a mistake to think that Abel and Cain were their only children. Obviously, Cain married his sister.

Some have calculated that it would have been possible for the world's population to have grown to over 400,000 people by the end of the first century. Even if no woman bore children until they were sixty-five years old there could have been nearly 1,200 people who could have been alive. Keep in mind their long lives. There was no scarcity of people as prospects for Cain's wife.

Too often we become very concerned about what is not revealed (Deuteronomy 29:29), and very lax about what is.

WHAT IS THE UNPARDONABLE SIN?

This question is often closely associated with the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, already shown to be the rejection of the gospel as given by and through the Holy Spirit. It is thought by some that is the unpardonable sin.

But there is no sin that the blood of Christ cannot and will not cover provided the conditions of forgiveness are met (Romans 5:20). No sin is pardonable unless the conditions are met. God has provided the way of forgiveness and no sin is unpardonable because of the nature of the sin.

First John 5:15 speaks of a sin unto death and a sin not unto death. We should pray regarding a brother who has sinned a sin not unto death, but it is useless to pray for a

sin unto death because all the prayer in the world by someone else will not remove sin unless the sinner confesses it (First John 1:9). Any sin can be a sin unto death if not confessed, and thus not forgiven. But no sin need be a sin unto death if confessed and hence forgiven.

CAN A CHILD OF GOD SO SIN AS TO BE LOST?

This questions introduces the doctrine of "once saved, always saved." It is sometimes called the doctrine of impossibility to fall from grace.

It is true that once a sin is forgiven by the Lord that sin shall never be the cause of one being lost. Once saved from past sins, those sins are gone forever. By coming to Christ by obeying the gospel man receives forgiveness of past sins. But that does not mean man cannot sin in the future and be lost (First John 1:8,10; Romans 6:23).

First John 3:9 reads, "*Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin: for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.*" Cannot does not always means impossible. Genesis 44:22 says that the lad (Benjamin) cannot leave his father (Jacob). But we know this was not impossible because he actually did leave his father and was taken to Egypt as Joseph had directed. This verse does not mean it is impossible for a child of God to sin, which would contradict what John wrote in the first chapter, but emphasizes the incompatibility of a child of God sinning. He cannot keep on sinning and be faithful to God.

John 3:36 says, "*He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*" Some argue that one who "*hath*" eternal life already has it and if eternal life it is never-ending, therefore, one cannot fall, having already attained eternal life.

One does have eternal life who believes, but in what sense? Many make the mistake of only taking part of God's teaching on the subject, omitting other teaching, and drawing false conclusions. First John 2:25 makes it clear the believer has eternal life in promise, not in

reality as yet. Hebrews 9:15 speaks of the *"hope of eternal life."* Eternal is a quality of life as well as the extent of life. As children of God we have a certain quality of life and the expectation of being with God forever.

It is inconsistent and incompatible for a Christian to sin (Romans 6:1,2). But it is not impossible. John 5:24, *"He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation: but is passed from death to life."* This passage refers to the same person of John 3:36. If *"shall not"* means it is impossible to be lost once you believe, then why would *"shall not"* mean it is impossible to ever be saved if one did not believe at the moment? The final *"enter thou into the joys of the Lord"* comes at the judgment, but not now.

We read of many who were children of God who did so sin as to be lost, such as Adam, Judas, the Israelites in the wilderness, Simon the sorcerer, even some who were disciples of Christ (John 6:66), like Ananias and Saphirra, Demas, some who were members of the churches of Galatia (Galatians 5:4), as well as some in the churches of Asia (Revelation 2:3).

If the doctrine of "once saved, always saved" is true, considerable portions of the New Testament are foolishness because they consist of warnings against falling, against doing the very thing some we cannot do anyway. The book of Hebrews was specifically written to prevent apostasy. Such texts as First Corinthians 10:12, Second Peter 1:9,10; 2:20-22 would have no meaning. These all show it is possible to so sin as to be lost even though one has once come to Christ.

Many miss the real issue. Christ came to do the Father's will (John 6:37-39). It is the will of the Father that none be lost (Second Peter 3:9). But all will not be saved because all will not believe. The believer will be saved. But cannot a believer cease to believe? He can. And if he does, he will not be a believer, and will be lost.

WERE THOSE BAPTIZED BY JOHN'S BAPTISM BAPTIZED AGAIN AFTER THE COMING OF THE CHURCH ON PENTECOST?

John was the forerunner of Christ and he preached the coming of the kingdom, which is the church which began on Pentecost. His baptism was for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4), in water (Matthew 3:11), looking forward to the coming of Christ (Acts 19:4). It was a part of his overall work of preparing the way for the Lord as he was commissioned (Luke 7:30). Surely, what he did was sufficient to do what he was sent to do. To contend one baptized of John had to be baptized again after Pentecost is to contend John's work of preparation was inadequate. Those baptized before Pentecost did not have to be baptized again.

However, Acts 19:4 reveals where Paul did rebaptize some who had been baptized by John's baptism. Evidently they had been baptized of John's baptism after Pentecost and before the baptism of the great commission, first preached on Pentecost, was operative and they had not been baptized for the remission of sins in the name of Christ. Since their baptism was improper, they were rebaptized, the second time in the name of Christ as were those on Pentecost. (I use the terms rebaptize and rebaptized with accommodation, realizing that actually one may be immersed but not properly, and then must be immersed again. If one is baptized properly he is never "rebaptized" properly).

This shows that being baptized, even immersed in water which is baptism, but with the wrong understanding and for the wrong purpose is invalid as far as spiritual blessings are concerned, and the person should be baptized properly, by the right authority, and for the right purpose. Some are baptized to join some denomination, or to prove they are already saved, or possibly some other reason. These are wrong reasons. Such people should be baptized in the name of Christ, immersed in water for the remission of sins.

Regardless of what those baptized of John's baptism were to do, that has no effect on us today. We are to obey the Lord with the baptism He and His apostles taught.

HOW DO YOU KNOW BAPTISM IS A BURIAL?

There are several ways we can know baptism is a burial. The word "baptize" means to immerse, submerge, bury, plunge beneath. Baptism is the "*form of doctrine*" that saves (Romans 6:16-18). The doctrine is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (First Corinthians 15:1-4). Baptism is its "*form*" or pattern, representation. We are "*planted*" with Him in the likeness of the death (Romans 6:5).

Verbal pictures of baptismal scenes show a going into the water, the baptism taking place, a coming up out of the water. Both the one baptized and the one doing the baptizing go into the water. Substitute measures like sprinkling and pouring do not present such a picture, nor do they require such actions.

The Greek words for sprinkling and pouring are different words from the word for baptize or baptism.

Baptism is called a burial in Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12.

Secular history also reveals the early church practiced immersion. Whether one contends baptism is a burial or something else depends on the degree or respect one has for God's Scripture.

IS ONE ACCOUNTABLE BEFORE GOD WHO IS MENTALLY DERANGED?

It is difficult to know just what are the powers of comprehension a person has. When should a person be thought mentally inadequate or incapable of obeying the gospel? We do know that God expects only what we are capable of doing (Second Corinthians 8:12). If we are capable of obeying, we must obey (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9).

To be able to obey the gospel one must be able to hear the Word (including understanding what is heard), believe it,

recognize sin for what it is, repent of sin, confess faith in Christ, and obey from the heart (with sincerity and understanding) the command to be baptized for the remission of sins. If one cannot do these things, he cannot be accountable because he cannot obey.

An infant, a very young child, falls into this category. They are not lost, but safe. The mentally deranged certainly are in this category. However, one can once have the capacity to obey, but delay until such time that capacity is lost due to injury, age, disease, etc. and would be accountable.

HOW OLD SHOULD ONE BE BEFORE BEING BAPTIZED?

This questions deals with some of the same material of the previous question. When to be baptized is not a matter of chronological age, but of capacity to understand and obey. It is not just understanding. Many have the capacity to understand but do not. It is the capacity to understand.

Some have erroneously thought the age of twelve is the time because Jesus was twelve when He went to the temple. This is faulty and forced. There is no connection between that visit, Jewish requirements, and baptism.

There is a time of innocence (Matthew 19:14). There does come a time of accountability (Second Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10,12). That time varies from individual to individual depending upon one's capacity to meet the conditions of salvation. Ordinarily, but not always, that state will be reached somewhere around eight to twelve years or age, possibly older but not much. Whatever age, one must be taught and know what he or she is doing to properly obey the Lord. Youth should be taught to remember their Creator in their youth (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

WHAT IS THE MARK OF THE BEAST?

The answer one gives to this question depends on his approach to the book of Revelation. The approach I contend to be the most consistent is to consider what is prophesied in Revelation to now be history, with some exception. That which was prophesied pertained to events concerning the early church, having to do with the various persecutions from Jews and Romans which the church was suffering and would continue to suffer for some time to come. Those events were to "*shortly come to pass*", and were "*at hand*" (Revelation 1:1,3; 22:6). But the book has meaning to the church today.

The theme of Revelation is an encouragement to faithfulness because only by being faithful would there be victory. It is a mistake to consider Revelation as a play-by-play forecast of all the future history of the world, or even the history of the church as if Revelation is tomorrow's newspaper in advance. I sometimes ridicule this view of Revelation by saying some people look at Revelation to find out who will be the next president and who will win the World Series. The view is almost that foolish.

The book is highly symbolic and figurative, and it does not behoove me to be too dogmatic as to the meaning of all of its specifics, although its symbols can be best understood by the way they have been used in the Old Testament, the fulfillment of which was have recorded in the New Testament in many, many instances.

The mark of the beast is mentioned eight times. The beast is the Roman power, the persecutor of the church. It is not to be understood as a literal mark of a literal beast, like a tattoo or a mark by a branding iron. It is significant that those who would yield and bow to the edicts of the Roman emperor would renounce Christ. This was the badge, identification, marking of those who would be condemned. It shows an allegiance and submission to the persecuting power of the Roman empire. It was the mark of those who would rather switch than fight the good fight of faith. This seems to me to be the most logical and consistent understanding, although there are many opinions offered that differ from this. Evidently, all cannot be right. But what we

believe is consistent with the other portions of Revelation and well as actual history of events.

People grope about excessively for solutions to these things, but they certainly are not essential to our salvation. Knowledge of them increases our understanding. But we should never allow such things interfere with more important matters we can know.

DISCUSS THE BIBLICAL REASONS FOR DIVORCE.

Did you notice the way the question is asked? The question assumes something that is not true. It suggests there are reasons (plural) for divorce. There is only one reason God will allow divorce and that is fornication (Matthew 5:32; 19:9). That settles that for those who respect the Word of God.

The word “porneia” means illicit sexual intercourse, which includes fornication, adultery, bestiality, incest, homosexuality, lesbianism, etc. The Lord’s design for sexual union is in marriage, one man, one woman, for life, with only one cause that allows divorce. That’s it!

Even though marital matters may become complicated with some situations, these overruling factors govern the relationship and cannot be dismissed. First Corinthians 7:15 is not another reason for divorce. Divorce is not under discussion in that chapter. The teaching there is the Christian is not bound to his or her mate if it means forsaking Christ. Such bondage which they are not under is one to which Christians cannot submit. We are bond servants of Christ, not to our mates. Marriage is not a slave/owner relationship. If there is separation, the believer leaves, the alternatives are clear. There must either be reconciliation or remain unmarried. Divorce and remarriage are not acceptable alternatives.

Some have falsely suggested the party guilty of fornication is also free to remarry. This is not true. The last part of Matthew 19:9 teaches the one who marries the person who has been put away because of fornication is in adultery. Obviously, if the one who marries the put

away person is in adultery, so is the put away person. The guilty is not free to remarry.

There are only three classes of people who have God's approval to marry: (1) those who have never married (First Corinthians 7:36); (2) those who have married but their mate died (Romans 7:3); (3) and those who have married and have been divorced because their mate was guilty of fornication (Matthew 19:9). A more lengthy discussion of this theme has been presented in other lessons, tracts, and books.

WHERE DID ALL OF THE RACES COME FROM?

They all came from Adam (Acts 17:26). Efforts to be more specific involves one in extensive speculation and hypothesis. All we can know for absolute certainty is what we read in Genesis and what Paul said in Athens.

WHAT IS MEANT BY THE 1,000 YEAR REIGN IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION?

Like the mark of the beast, the answer depends on the approach to the book. Some things we know it does not mean, but it is more difficult to determine with dogmatic precision just what it does mean. It does not mean the reign of Christ on earth for one thousand years. Lessons on the errors of premillennialism expose this fallacious view. The reign noted in Revelation twenty is the reign of martyred souls, not an earthly reign by anybody.

In that chapter, there is no mention of the bodily resurrection, but a spiritual resurrection of the cause of Christ which was under persecution, and for which the martyrs had died. The martyred souls were earlier seen crying, "*How long? How Long?*" Later they are seen as on thrones, indicative of ultimate victory, and the victory of the cause for which they died. The number "1,000" is a numerical symbol of completeness, showing the completeness of the victory of those faithful in the church, thus surviving the effects of all enemies to destroy them. The term is used this way also in Deuteronomy 7:9 showing completeness.

Rather than a literal 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth in the literal city of Jerusalem, it is a symbolic expression denoting the ultimate success of the faithful, especially those who gave their lives for Christ.

WHAT DOES BEING BAPTIZED FOR THE DEAD MEAN?

Read First Corinthians 15:19. First, no passage should be understood so as to contradict easily understood passages. Each passage must be studied in its context. This statement of Paul is made in that great chapter where Paul proves the resurrection of Christ. It has nothing to do with a substitutionary baptism by the living on behalf of those who have died without having obeyed, as is practiced by Mormons. If it means what Mormons say it means, since baptism saves (First Peter 3:21), why not be baptized repeatedly so all would be saved? But the Bible is plain enough that each shall give account for himself (Romans 14:12). Obedience to God in baptism is a personal matter and we cannot rely on others to do for us what we must do for ourselves.

The passage is in the midst of Paul's arguments on behalf of the truthfulness of the resurrection. He is saying that there is no use being baptized if this life is all there is to our existence. Why make preparation for a life beyond this if there is no such thing? Baptism is a part of that preparation. Seeing we must die, and there is existence beyond the grave, we should prepare. As verse thirty emphasizes, why be in jeopardy, suffer persecution, or obey such commands as baptism if it is all meaningless? The very fact these things are to be done is evidence that life after this is a reality. This is not substitute baptism for others, but teaches the relationship of baptism to the resurrection and eternity.

HOW DOES ONE BECOME A SAINT?

Paul called brethren saints in nearly every epistle he wrote. The way one becomes a saint is precisely and simultaneously the way one becomes a Christian. One must obey the gospel.

A saint is not some person made so by some Romanist decree. He is not someone who has reached sinless perfection, or even near it. Sainthood is not a "second measure of grace," or the result of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Saints are Christians because they have been sanctified, set apart from sin and into Christ.

WHAT DO YOU HAVE AGAINST EASTER AND CHRISTMAS?

Denominationalists notice that members of the church of Christ do not celebrate these days as religious holy days as they do. It is a shame that many must not read their Bibles but have concocted various religious celebrations of human origin. Easter is said to denote the resurrection of Christ as Christmas is called His birthday. Neither is taught in Scripture.

Once again, it goes back to the matter of authority and respect for authority (Colossians 3:17). There simply is no authority regarding such celebrations. Christians believe Christ was born of the virgin Mary, and that He arose from the dead. The Deity of Christ is stressed in both events. But as for a special holy day celebrating them, there is no authority. To teach as our commandments the doctrines of men is to make our worship vain (Matthew 15:9). Neither of these celebrations is a part of New Testament Christianity.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER HEARD THE GOSPEL?

While being concerned for such people, let us also be concerned for ourselves, and our responsibility to take the gospel to the world. But the Bible teaches we cannot be saved without the gospel (Mark 16: 15, 16; Romans 1:16; Hebrews 11:6 alongside Romans 10: 13-17; James 1:21; Acts 11:14). If people can be saved without the gospel, we should leave them alone and not bother them with the duties imposed by the gospel. If ignorance means salvation, let us suppress the good news rather than preach it, and all will be well for everyone. Second Thessalonians 1:7-9 answers the question explicitly.

Such people are and will remain lost. One cannot be saved without believing and obeying the gospel. They cannot do that until they hear it.

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WHY IS THE CHURCH OF CHRIST NOT A DENOMINATION?

Many have only considered the term "church" in the context of a denomination and have difficulty understanding the use of it Biblically. The Bible never speaks nor authorizes the existence of any denomination that has, does, or shall ever exist.

Yet, the Bible does proclaim the Lord's church. There is no kinship between the church and denominationalism. They are antagonistic toward each other. They follow different authorities, teach different doctrines, practice different things, one having Christ as its head and Savior, the other having no Biblical authority to exist. The church existed before there was any denomination. There is only one church approved of God (Ephesians 4:4) which is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23).

Where do men get the idea of denominationalism from Scripture? It simply is not to be found there.

WILL WE KNOW EACH OTHER IN HEAVEN?

Certainly not, if we do not get there. But answers to such questions are not explicitly revealed, but we can determine from various revelations the answer. The evidence is that there will be recognition in heaven.

There are records of those who have died but are recognized (Luke 16; Matthew 17). The body as well as the spirit will be raised (First Corinthians 15), but it will be the same body as a spiritual body. There may well be some recognition, but we are not able to tell just what and how.

Christ promised His apostles He would be with them and they with Him (John 14). Surely this indicates an eventual recognition that the promise might be fulfilled.

We do know that earthly relationships will not be the same (Matthew 22:30). But whatever be the situation, it will never mar our joy or happiness. The joy of heaven will not be determined by whether we recognize someone or not. It is somewhat comforting to know we shall be together again with faithful loved ones who have gone before us. This is a question from which we would rather pull away because there is not an abundance of evidence, but as we said, enough is given to lead us to the conclusion that there will be recognition in some form or fashion.

WHAT GOOD IS THE OLD TESTAMENT SINCE WE DO NOT GO BY IT, AS YOU SAY?

We have heard it said that we of the churches of Christ do not believe the Old Testament. This is false. All Scripture is inspired of God (Second Timothy 3:16,17), and we believe it all. Things written aforetime are for our learning and our example (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 10:11). From the Old Testament we learn prophecies that were fulfilled in the New. We see the type-antitype relationship of the two testaments. The things of the Old are shadows of the things revealed in the New (Hebrews 10:1).

We are not living subject to the Old because we live under Christ (Hebrews 1: 1,2; John 14:6; Acts 4:12). The Old has been nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14), and fulfilled (Matthew 5:17). But we see in operation various principles of God's dealings with man, and the gradual unfolding of His scheme of redemption for man through Christ. These principles are still true even though the specifics of the old law are not binding.

The better we understand the Old Testament, the easier we can understand the New Testament. We can learn much of the difference between right and wrong from knowledge of it. There was a purpose in what is recorded in the Old Testament. The failure to recognize the distinction between dispensations and covenants, however, has contributed to much religious error. We must learn to "*rightly divide the word of truth*" (Second Timothy 2:15).

WHAT DOES IT MEAN THAT ONE BORN OF GOD CANNOT SIN (FIRST JOHN 3:9)?

This was answered previously regarding the doctrine "once saved, always saved." Cannot does not always mean impossible, but also means inconsistent, incompatible. One cannot do something and consistently, compatibly, be faithful to God.

Sometimes cannot does mean impossible. John 3:3, "*Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*" John 15:4, the branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine.

But it does not always mean impossible. Acts 4:16, a notable miracle had been done and they said, "*We cannot deny it.*" But many did deny the miracles, but not consistently. Acts 4:20, Peter said, "*For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*" They could speak other things, but not consistently with their duty to God. Genesis 34:14, when the Israelites were asked by the men of Shechem to allow Dinah to become the wife of one of them, they were told, "*We cannot do this thing.*" It was not impossible, but inconsistent with their law to do so. Genesis 44:22, when Joseph said Benjamin must be brought to Egypt, the brothers said, "*The lad cannot leave his father.*" But he could, and did.

In John 3:9 the meaning is the latter meaning. The same epistle shows the possibility of Christians sinning (First John 1:8, 10), and how to be forgiven of sin (First John 1:9). Romans 6:1,2 shows the inconsistency of sin in the life of a Christian, not the impossibility. Acts 8:22 shows sin did occur with a Christian, and what he had to do to be forgiven.

WHY DO YOU SAY THOSE IN DENOMINATIONS ARE LOST?

We say this, but it is never said in a spirit of self-righteousness or hatred toward those in denominations. But is it not also fair to ask why one should contend those in denominations are saved even though they have not obeyed the gospel as taught in the New Testament, and not even teach the necessity of doing so?

Can one be saved and not obey Christ? (Hebrews 5:9). Christ is the Savior of the body (Ephesians 5:23), and the church is His body (Ephesians 1:22, 23). The church is not a denomination nor the total of denominations because there is nothing in Scripture about denominations. None of them even existed until hundreds of years after the church was established on Pentecost (Acts 2).

The gospel produces only Christian, members of the Lord's church. It does not produce members of denominations that have been started by men.

Actually, the burden of proof regarding salvation of those in bodies other than God's church rests upon those who so contend. We preach the gospel as God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16), and the necessity of obedience thereto (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9). Those who hear, believe, and obey have God's promise of salvation. Those that do not obey do not have this promise regardless of how honest, sincere, moral, or religious they may be. No person has the right to change the truth on this matter in order to accommodate people in denominations.

WHAT DID JESUS MEAN WHEN HE SAID TO LET THE DEAD BURY THE DEAD?

Death means separation. There is physical and spiritual death because there are those who are physically and spiritually dead. Matthew 8:19-22 uses the term in both senses. Jesus taught priorities and putting first things first. He is not teaching disrespect for fathers who have died. He is not saying to ignore such necessities as burying the bodies of the physically dead. But He is calling for His followers to recognize the need of following Him even before attending to such matters as burying the beloved dead. Before putting Christ into a secondary position, let the spiritually dead bury the physically dead. He is not prohibiting funerals, nor the proper disposal of the physical remains. Matters of greater importance, however, must take precedence over lesser things. This teaching is similar to that in

Matthew 6:33 where we are taught to put Christ and His kingdom first.

WHY CAN AN ELDER DRINK NO WINE BUT A DEACON CAN DRINK A LITTLE WINE?

The question is founded on a false premise and false position. It is provoked by the phrases of First Timothy 3:3,8. Verse three, the elder is not to be given to wine. Verse eight, the deacon is not to be given to much wine.

First, there is no conclusive evidence in the New Testament that early Christians ever drank fermented wine, or approved of it. There are several instances of drinking wine, but wine does not necessarily mean fermented wine. That which was used for the Lord's Supper is not called wine, but the "*fruit of the vine*." grape juice, not strong drink.

It has been abundantly documented that there were several methods of preventing fermentation of grape juice even in the first century. What was used at the Passover was without contamination or pollution, as seen in the direction for unleavened bread. Medicinal use of wine was authorized (First Timothy 5:23). If you have what Timothy had, then you have authority to use what Timothy used. Are you confident you know both of these matters?

Jesus made "*good wine*," (John 2), which is defined by linguists as unfermented. To contend that Jesus made what prophets condemned to be given to others is to put Christ in violation of the inspired teaching of the prophets. Again we state, there is no evidence the early Christians used or approved the use of intoxicating beverages. All the evidence points the opposite way.

Even if they did, one still must prove that the intoxicating beverages of today are what they may have used. This is impossible to equate. What is called social drinking is specifically condemned in First Peter 4:3 by the word "*banqueting*," which means taking strong drink in small amounts. Peter also refers to the "*excess of riot*," and the "*excess of wine*." Can one create a small

riot and be correct? Can he riot in moderation? Or is rioting excessive? The same will apply to wine.

What was forbidden the elders? Obviously, intoxicating wine because the Lord's Supper involved the fruit of the vine, which is wine, meaning the produce of the grape. They were not forbidden the Lord's Supper. Even from the Old Testament those of leadership were prohibited from strong drink.

Whatever was allowed for deacons must be understood in compatibility with other teaching regarding strong drink, and qualities of leadership. The teaching simply calls for moderation even in that which is allowed. There is no such thing as moderation in that which is sinful and prohibited.

My son illustrated the truth this way. He said he recalled when he would go out at night with his friends that I would tell him, "Don't get into a lot of trouble." Never once did he think I was telling him it would be all right to get into a little trouble.

Science has proven that drunkenness is a matter of degree. None who respects Scripture denies drunkenness is sinful. Alcohol is not what is forbidden. There are legitimate uses of it in medicine, preservation of foods, cooking, killing germs, etc. What is forbidden is using it as a beverage, whether one is an elder, deacon, Christian or non-Christian.

We face tremendous drug problems in our land, and the number one drug problem is due to alcoholic beverages. Who could possibly contend in the light of fruits as well as specific Scripture that drinking alcoholic beverages harmonizes with the character and teaching of the perfect Son of God?

WHY DO YOU SAY BAPTISM IS NECESSARY FOR SALVATION WHEN THE BIBLE TEACHES WE ARE SAVED BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST, NOT BY WATER?

First, the Bible does teach salvation by the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9). It also teaches we are saved by water in baptism (First Peter 3:21). It teaches we must obey Christ to be saved (Hebrews 5:9). Christ gave baptism as a condition of salvation (Mark 16:16). This is why we teach the same thing.

It is not a question of water ~~or~~ blood. Both are involved. We reach the blood of Christ when we are baptized into His death where His blood was shed (Romans 6:3,4). We are baptized unto Christ (Galatians 3:27) where salvation is (Second Timothy 2:10). We are saved by His blood when we are baptized into Him and His death. We are baptized into His body (First Corinthians 12:13), which is His church (Ephesians 1:22,23), and which He saves (Ephesians 5:23). His blood is in His body just as our blood is in our body.

When one is baptized he is not depending on the water to save, but the blood of Christ to save. He is merely obeying what the Lord commands by which he reaches the saving blood according to God's plan.

We wonder why some people plot one part of God's plan against another part as if either part is exclusive of the other. We are saved by many factors working together, such as grace, mercy, love, blood, the resurrection of Christ, faith, works of obedience to the law of Christ, good works in life, indeed, a long list of factors revealed in Scripture. This either/or approach to God's plan is a gross error. Cannot we see the need to take the whole counsel of God rather than isolate one factor to the exclusion of everything else God has revealed? The real question is not whether we are saved by the blood of Christ. We are. The question is **WHEN** are we saved by the blood of Christ. It is when we obey the Lord in baptism whereby God teaches we then reach His saving blood. This baptism is a water baptism (Acts 8, 10; First Peter 3:21). /

IF BAPTISM IS NECESSARY TO SALVATION, WHY WAS THE THIEF SAVED WITHOUT IT?

Let those who contend baptism is not necessary prove the thief was never baptized. Many in the area of Judea were baptized of John. His baptism was for the remission of sins (Mark 1:4). Could the thief have been among them? I do not contend he was. I contend he could have been. Let those who say so confidently he never was baptized prove what they say. But that is not the important issue here.

It is not "if" baptism is necessary, but "since" baptism is necessary. Repentance and remission of sins in the name of Christ (by His authority) was first preached on Pentecost. Those who lived prior to that day were not commanded to be baptized in His name. The thief lived and died before Pentecost. That is why it was not necessary for the thief. But since Pentecost, the message of the gospel calls for baptism for the remission of sins.

The same reasoning tells us why such people as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and many others were not baptized. They were never directed to be. It also explains why every example of conversion in the book of Acts is concluded with baptism. We are so commanded. We live under the will of Christ (Hebrews 9:15-17) which did not become operative until after His death. Again, the thief did not live under that will.

We cannot look to the thief as an example of the way people are saved under the will of Christ anymore than we can look to Rahab or Joshua. This ploy is often used by denominational people to dispose of God's command to be baptized, but they fail to rightly divide the word of truth. Efforts to get around what the Lord has commanded are abominable.

* * * * *

This is all the space we have in this issue to discuss these questions so often asked of us. Lord willing, we shall devote a portion of the next issue to a few others.

* * * * *

It Remains Unchanged

We live in a era when there is much clamor for change, any kind of change, without much regard from what we change and to what we change. This infection has long been found in religion when men think they someway change God's will because they decide they want to do things differently from the way God has authorized. Is there much of anything about the will of Christ that somebody, somewhere, has not tried to change in order to accommodate what people want? But does it change God's revelation to man? Absolutely not! Not in the slightest degree! Man only deceives himself to think the unchangeable truth of God can be tossed around to fit what man wants. JWB

The Last Word

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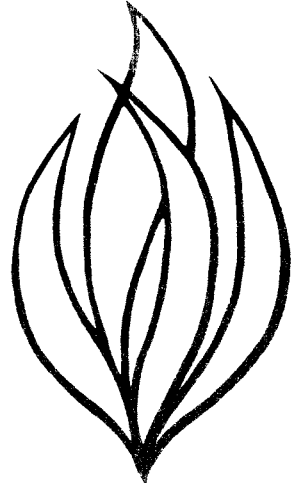
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*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forebearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*

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THIS ISSUE

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Victory to the Faithful

BC

More Questions and Answers

In our last issue we presented a number of questions that had been asked of television panels on which I have appeared, questions that were asked by the viewers, and were asked more often than others. We also presented Biblical answers to those questions.

In this issue we wish to present a few more of the questions that reflect the interest viewers had about Biblical matters, and offer you Biblical answers as best we can. We urge each reader to spend some good study on these things and be ready to give answer to people who may ask you such things.

We cannot always determine the motive behind questions asked of us, but whatever the motive, that is between the questioner and God. Many times Jesus was questioned and those asking the questions had insincere and ulterior motives for doing so. However, we cannot determine that unless it is so obvious their motives are evil, and they betray their motives. But we give answer to questions assuming that those who ask really want to know the truth.

I hope you will continue to enjoy this kind of study.

* * * * *

WHY DO YOU NOT ANOINT THE SICK WITH OIL?

James 5:1-316, "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing praise. Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him."

Sickness is universal to mankind. It is possible for a child of God to be sick. This does not necessarily mean his sickness is due to his personal sins, however.

The teaching is to call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil. Oil was used in two ways: (1) as medicine, as in the parable of the Good Samaritan, (2) and symbolically, as used in anointing one as king, prophet, priest, or showing one has been set apart or designated in some way for some specific purpose.

In our text it is used symbolically, serving as a token of God's power by Whom healing comes, designating the sick as the recipient of such power. We must remember that this was written in the time when miraculous healing was utilized. The reason we do not anoint with oil today is because the day of miraculous healing has passed as have all miracles, inasmuch as they have accomplished their purpose of confirming the Word, and those who were endowed with such power to heal miraculously have long ago died.

When one becomes sick today he calls for the doctor to learn what medicine is useful to produce a cure, and he calls for brethren to pray that God, by His providence, not His miracles, will provide healing the medicine is intended to produce. The oil did not heal even then. The prayer of faith that called for God's power was the means of healing. With or without the oil, God's power, then miraculously and now providentially, heals, and this power is besought in prayer. God still heals, but not miraculously as is implied in this passage. God provides our food also, but not miraculously as when Jesus fed the five and four thousand, but through His natural laws in operation.

It is still proper to pray for the sick that God might raise them up. To anoint with oil would leave the false impression we expected a miraculous cure. Such is not according to God's will. For this reason we do not anoint the sick with oil. Neither do those who practice this produce miraculous cures for those over whom they pray.

TTTTT

ARE THERE DEGREES OF REWARD AND PUNISHMENT?

Some seem to have the idea that if they can just "get their foot in the door of heaven" all will be well with them. We dare not allow this question lead us to develop a "get by" attitude, (just get a small degree of ward), toward serving the Lord which would indicate salvation on our own merit.

There are several passages that suggest degrees of reward and punishment. Luke 12: 47,48 speaks of many stripes and few stripes. Much is required of those to whom much is given. The variation of punishment is according to ability to produce. The parable of the talents (Matthew 25) implies degrees of reward and punishment according to ability. Matthew 10:15 says it will be more tolerable for some than others. Also see Matthew 11:22. Scripture indicates a heavier judgment on those with greater opportunity (James 3:1). These are inescapable indications. Yet there are other verses that would suggest such is not the case.

Second Timothy 4:6-8 says Paul would receive a crown of righteousness which God would give to others also. In the parable about workers entering the vineyard at different hours there are indications of equal reward.

About the most conclusive and certain thing we can say on the subject is that our reward will be enjoyed to the fullest of our capacity to enjoy it. It is possible that capacities vary. Who would suggest we have the capacity to appreciate heaven on an equality with Paul? But we need not be concerned with the subject. If God wanted us to know conclusively about it, or even more about it, He would have revealed it. We cannot see how knowledge of the answer would be of any great benefit to us.

Our duty is clear. God wants us to be living sacrifices (Romans 12:1,2). We must constantly do our best in Christ. God is just and righteous and will deal with each one as is proper in His infinite and holy wisdom. Anything less than complete commitment to God endangers the soul. The answer given here may not be as

definite as some would like, but this is as definite as I think the Scriptures will allow.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE MEAN WHEN IT SPEAKS OF BEING PREDESTINED AND FOREORDAINED?

There is a doctrine of Calvinism that teaches God has already decided who of us shall be saved and who will be lost, even decided before we were born. Furthermore, the doctrine says there is nothing anybody can do to change that decision one way or the other. A similar view is that "whatever will be, will be" because all things are already programmed and out of our control, but left only to fate, chance, or a predetermined scenario. People speak of death being the time "when your number comes up," as if the date and hour of your death is already set.

Romans 8:28 and Ephesians 1:5,11 speak of this matter of predestination. It is said of Christ, First Peter 1:18-20, that it was foreordained before the foundation of the world the way of salvation would be through Christ. We believe there are those things that have happened and shall happen that God has "set in concrete." The return of Christ, the end of the world, the resurrection and judgment are among such things. The mission of Christ to this earth to provide salvation for mankind was also predetermined by the Lord of heaven. This is evident from the inspired prophecies and their eventual fulfillment in Christ. So it is not a question whether God has predetermined some things, but what things, and to what extent. Has He predetermined our salvation without us having anything to do with it whatsoever?

It is evident that God made man a creature of choice with the power of volition. All things that have happened have not been foreordained to happen. They happened because of man's choices regarding them. It was predetermined that Abraham would have a son by Sarah, that Israel would be a great nation, that Christ would be born of a virgin, that all shall physically die. But when we die, how, where, under what circumstances, and our spiritual state at death is not predetermined. God has predetermined a certain class of people that

shall be saved (those who believe and obey Him), and a certain class of people who shall be lost (those who do not believe and obey). But each one has the right to choose which class he will enter.

If everything is already predetermined, then an invitation to fallen mankind is a hoax. Man would not be responsible for his destiny. If any are lost it will be totally God's fault. The gospel message ought never have been sent forth because whatever one does about it changes nothing.

The fact that there are conditions to salvation shows we have the power of choice and are accountable for ourselves. It is not yet settled where we shall exist in eternity. We will make that decision on the basis of what we do regarding Christ and His church.

IS IT WRONG FOR A BOY OR MAN TO WEAR LONG HAIR?

Paul answer the question plainly enough in First Corinthians 11:14,15. Obviously, the Lord disapproves of hair styles that confuse the sexes. While long and short are relative terms, it is evident that they meant something. It is relative to what men and women commonly wear. Hair styles change somewhat. In the days of our forefathers the hair styles were different and would be considered unacceptable today. The hair styles of women vary considerably. We are involved with custom to some degree in this question. But we are also involved in clear distinctions between male and female, and those distinctions are to be noticeable.

In Paul's day for a woman to go without a veil marked her as a harlot. Such was the custom. It is not so today. The lack of a veil gives no such marking. While remembering that confusion over the sexes was to be avoided in the Old Testament even in clothing worn, the Christian ought to present himself/herself in such fashion as is modest and that will bring no reproach upon the cause he professes.

To wear hair styles that are characteristic and would mark you as a dope peddler, rock-and-roll barbarian, a rebel against authority, an imitator of the lowest and most immoral forms of humanity, certainly is not commendable for a child of God. It is fruitless to deny that such styles often seen today are those advocated by the rioter, disturber, dope head, rebel, godless, immoral, and renegade. They even boast that long hair on the male is a sign and mark of that kind. That is their badge by their own claim. Why should Christians wish to imitate that element and be confused as one of that sort? While some who wear shorter hair styles are also beneath contempt, it is openly boasted that long hair is the sign of being such a person.

Should we not do that which is honorable in the sight of all men (Romans 12:7)? Shall we not abstain from all appearance of evil (First Thessalonians 5:22)? Shall we do that which brings reproach on the way of Christ (Titus 2:5)?

The same word used to describe men wearing long hair (First Corinthians 11:14, shame) is the word used to define homosexuality, vile (Romans 1:26). This ought tell us the answer. Especially when parents teach their young not to wear their hair in this fashion are the young obligated to obey parents. To refuse to do so is rebelling against parents and the will of God. When it is offensive to faithful brethren it ought not be done, and it is offensive because it violates the Scriptures cited.

There is no evidence that Christ and the apostles were in their appearance like long hair hippies. Would inspired men openly, deliberately, continuously go contrary to what another inspired man wrote? Would Jesus appear in a fashion that was contrary to what the Holy Spirit taught?

Some among the Jews took the Nazarite vow which called for not cutting the hair. If wearing long hair was a regular and customary fashion, the sign of the vow would be no sign at all. It is wrong for men to wear their hair in long fashion that would confuse them with women and be like women. Many have violated this New Testament teaching, even many who profess to be

children of God, in order to be counted as "with it," one of the "swinging generation." God will hold such people accountable and guilty lest they repent. //

WHILE UNDERSTANDING IT IS WRONG TO USE A MECHANICAL INSTRUMENT OF MUSIC IN WORSHIP IN THE ASSEMBLY, WHAT DOES THE CHRISTIAN DO REGARDING THE USE OF INSTRUMENTS OTHER PLACES, SUCH AS IN THE HOME? MAY ONE SING HYMNS WITH INSTRUMENTS OF MUSIC IN THE HOME?

Whether a mechanical instrument of music is used is not the issue with faithful brethren. Whether it is used in worship anywhere is the issue. Regardless of where it is used, it is prohibited in worship for the reason that there is no authority for it, and what we do must be done by His authority (Colossians 3:17).

The instrument is not inherently evil. It can be acceptably used in entertainment, recreation, artistic performances, etc. But this is not worship. Songs of worship ought to be used for worship, not recreation, entertainment, or performances. Can one really sing "How Great Thou Art?" with the same intent and attitude as he might sing "O Susanna" or "My Old Kentucky Home?" Certainly not!

Why should one wish to see how close to error he can come anyway? If he has doubts he ought not (Romans 14:23). He could well lead others astray by such practices. There is nothing redeeming in using mechanical instruments with songs of worship at any time, except possibly to learn the melody as the written music defines. There is no redeeming merit for using songs of worship to entertain or perform as often is done. There is a way that is right and cannot be wrong, and we should follow that way.

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WAS THERE ANY PLAN OF SALVATION FOR THE NON-JEW DURING THE MOSAIC AGE?

Whatever be the answer to this question it will in no way affect the way we are to be saved. We note that the law of Moses was just for the Israelite nation (Deuteronomy 5; Exodus 20; Hebrews 9). It was never given to the Gentiles and Gentiles were never subject to it. That law had special functions and purposes that were accomplished with the coming of Christ (Matthew 5:17; Galatians 3:19; Romans 7:7). It was not the fulfillment of the promise God gave Abraham to send a Savior, one of his seed, through Whom all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3; 22:18; Galatians 3:18).

We know there were instances and evidences of God's concern for Gentiles during that Mosaic period of some fifteen hundred years duration. He sent Jonah to Nineveh. This fact is made plain also in Romans one because God gave mankind no excuse for not believing in Him. They had evidence of God but they worshipped the creature rather than the Creator. God gave them up to vile affections, gave them over to a reprobate mind, to uncleanness and degeneracy of their own choosing.

It appears that while God was developing the nation of Israel through which Christ would come, He was also proving through the Gentiles that man cannot govern himself without God, and is incapable of devising his own system of religion that will suffice. He used both Jew and Gentile to prepare mankind for the only solution, who is Christ.

Before the law of Moses God spoke to the heads of families in a direct manner, such as to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and others. Some have suggested that once God separated Israel from the rest of nations and gave them the written law from Sinai that God continued to deal with the rest of mankind in a direct fashion as He had done. This may be more speculation than revelation, however.

The Bible was not written to provide us an entire history of mankind or the entire history of God's dealing with mankind. It was written to reveal the system of salvation God designed, developed, and delivered through

His Son, Jesus Christ. For this reason, Biblical focus is on the Jewish nation and Mosaic law leading to Christ.

Some have said the Gentiles could have become Jews by being proselytes. This is true. But Judaism was not an evangelistic system and did not actively pursue converts. It was rather a religion that one followed due to ancestry. Others were often repelled by the Jews.

Surely the most important point to remember is that we now live under the universal and perfect law of liberty of Christ. Salvation is by the gospel and is for all because all need the gospel. Just what and how God dealt with other nations during the Mosaic age is an interesting study, but we have answers only at a fleeting glance at best, and not enough to draw any major and dogmatic conclusion, except that whatever way God dealt with them makes no difference to us now one way or another.

WHAT DID JOHN MEAN IN FIRST JOHN 3: 20,21?

"For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn is not, then we have confidence toward God."

We must remember never to assume an obscure passage means something that contradicts a clear passage. We cannot understand this to teach that what we think about a thing is the ultimate standard of right and wrong. We may do something that our heart, or conscience, may condemn us for doing. To violate our personal faith and conviction is sinful (Romans 14:23). What we believe may or may not be right before God, but if we violate what we believe to be right we are not being honest even with ourselves.

This does not mean, however, that if our heart or conscience does not condemn us that our action is necessarily approved of God. Our consciences must be trained and taught by the will of the Lord. When that is the case, when we sin our consciences will offend us and condemn us, and we can know God's will has been violated. We may do this or that and our heart or conscience not offend us. This does not necessarily mean

God approves of it because God is greater than our heart, and the heart just might not be properly taught and trained to be offended when God's will is violated. Many people do things with a good conscience but they are wrong before God because they have been taught incorrectly.

The point of emphasis is that the will of God is the standard of measure, and His will is greater than the measure of our heart or conscience, or how we may feel about a thing. We see from this the necessity of having the heart so taught and trained according to the will of God that it can serve us as a more reliable warning system concerning right and wrong.

PLEASE EXPLAIN THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BODY, SOUL, AND SPIRIT?

Sometimes Scripture speaks of man as body and soul, (Matthew 10:28), and other times as body, soul, and spirit (First Thessalonians 5:23). There is no problem discerning the distinction between body and soul, or between body on the one hand and soul and spirit on the other. We are familiar enough with the body to know this physical part of a human being. The body is the place of habitation of the soul and spirit.

Most often the term "soul" includes what is meant by "spirit" when the term "soul" is used by itself. Sometimes "souls" is used to simply designate persons (Acts 2:41). However, "soul" can also refer to the animalistic life of the human (Genesis 2:7), as well as the spirit of man which is created in the image of God. When both terms are used the distinction is that "soul" refers to the animalistic life, such as humans have in common with animals, and "spirit" refers to the spirit of man that is in God's likeness (Hebrews 4:12).

Whether one speaks of man as body and soul, or in his three-fold nature as body, soul, and spirit, it is evident there is more to man than just the materialistic flesh. While there are similarities between man and animals regarding movement and life, there is the great distinction that man is spirit and the only creature of

God that is created in His image. It is this spirit that Christ came to save from the ravages of sin.

WHY DENY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT BY DENYING POWER TO SPEAK IN TONGUES?

Bible believers do not deny that there were those who were capable of speaking miraculously in tongues as recorded in the New Testament. But tongues were languages which could be understood, miraculously spoken, even though they were not normal, native, or natural to the speaker.

That such abilities reside among men today is what is denied. This is not a denial of the power of the Holy Spirit, but respect for what the Holy Spirit has revealed in His Word about miracles and the purpose of tongues, who could speak them, and their cessation.

Some people mistakenly think when you teach the day of miracles has passed you are limiting God. This is not so. God has limited Himself, however. We have no right to deny Him the power to do that since that is what He has chosen to do. Because we contend God does not create people now the same way He created Adam and Eve is not a denial of the power of God. Because we contend God does not feed people with manna or ravens as recorded in instances in the Old Testament, or when Jesus fed the thousands from little substance, does not deny the power of God. Then why should anybody think it must be a denial of the power of God to say tongues, as spoken in Scripture, are not among us today?

Tongues were for a sign to unbelievers, used as other miracles to confirm the Word and spread the gospel before the complete revelation from God was given and before the all-sufficient Scriptures were available to man. When "*that which is perfect*" had come, with reference to the full and complete revelation of God, such things ceased. We now have God's all-sufficient and authoritative Word and the need for a practice of miraculously spoken languages has been removed.

CONCLUSION

We have touched on several subjects with the questions in this and the previous issue, but not near so many as arose over the course of years while answering questions over television programs with other brethren. But as I gleaned from the many programs those things which were asked, we have presented these which repeatedly came to the foreground. People do not always ask what is most needful, but what they want to hear discussed. Relatively few people wanted to hear how to be saved, how to worship God acceptably, the meaning of the Lord's Supper, even what God has spoken concerning the many moral issues confronting mankind. But we found the way to teach such things anyway. Often they asked from curiosity, or simply because they had some point they hoped to make. The propriety of the motives behind the questions asked remains between the inquirer and God. Whatever was the motive, we tried to deal with the question in a Biblical way. People may ask questions in order to learn, and we generally assumed this was the case. How many times we were naive is impossible to tell. We knew from Scripture that sometimes questions are asked in order to find fault and ensnare those who answer in contradictions and inconsistencies, attempting to establish preconceived views, or other such reasons.

But these questions doubtless give evidence of the interest, and level of that interest, that many have toward what the Bible teaches. We hope by offering the answers to these several questions that the reader will come to a greater knowledge of the truth, and be motivated to "search the scriptures" more and more, not only to know for oneself what truth is, but that they may be better able to convey that truth to others.

Something that does disturb is the increasing ignorance of the Bible among all people generally, even among members of the church. What is worse, there seems to be a growing attitude that it matters not what the Bible teaches anyway. We take strong exception to such things.

* * * * *

The Bible

NUMBER ONE

We shall be dealing with matters crucial to our faith or religion. We use the term "faith" as it is used in Jude three, "...*that ye should earnestly contend for the faith...*," meaning the religion, the faith, of which Jesus Christ is author, founder, and finisher. We shall deal with points of concern that are vital to the validity and integrity of New Testament Christianity.

Our faith resides in the One, the Christ, of Whom we read in the Bible. What a person can know of true Christianity and the will of the Christ is to be learned only from the Bible. Our faith, therefore, is no more reliable than the information we have regarding Him, what He did, what He taught, who He is, our obligations to Him, as is found in Scripture.

It is admitted by friend and foe alike that the Bible is a marvelous book. But not all agree that it is the Word of God. Some consider it to be God's plenary, verbally inspired Word just as it claims to be. But others consider it nothing more than an exceptional work at best, but totally of man. Still others look upon it as only ancient literature, even Jewish fable, folklore, and such like. Of course, there are many who have nothing but contempt for the Bible because it contradicts so much of what they say and do, and they are not hesitant to manifest their hatred toward it anyway and anytime they can.

There are several important questions that shall be raised and the truthfulness of the answers is at the heart of "the faith." If the Bible is true there are many who shall suffer because of their opposition to it. There are those who shall be blessed because they believe it. If it is false, many have been deceived and have been wasting their time, their hope is vain, and Christianity is just another human religion, no more, no less, no better, no worse than others. Some would even contend that Christianity is worse than others.

Questions to Ask

What is the Bible? What does it claim to be? How important is it to Christianity? From whence has it come? How did we get it in its present form? Can we have confidence in it and its completeness? Is part of it missing? Does it include anything that does not belong? Are we in possession of reliable texts and versions? What of the alleged contradictions and mistakes skeptics claim are in the Bible? What is the nature of the inspiration of the Bible?

We shall attempt to answer such questions in order to build faith, belief, confidence, and trust in the Bible, and remove those things that would destroy the Bible. Truth is always compatible with truth. We must investigate lest we have a flimsy and unsound basis for our lives, our religion, our hopes, and our destiny.

It Is An Old Writing

For want of a better place to start, let us start by saying the Bible is an ancient book, but by no means the oldest writing. There are earlier writings going back four to five thousand years before Christ. John 5:46,47 reveals that Moses wrote of Christ. For a long time skeptics denied this by saying that writing did not exist in the time of Moses, over thirty-five hundred years ago. But now it is well known that writing existed at least twenty-five centuries prior to Moses. This is one of the many instances where archeology has vindicated the claims of Scripture, at least showing the reasonableness and validity of its claim that Moses wrote of Christ.

Early writings were on stone, clay, wood, leather, papyrus sheets, vellums, parchments, cave walls, and eventually paper. Papyrus sheets are made from papyrus plants and are found in abundance. This was the most important writing material of the ancient world. The New Testament was originally written on such sheets.

As for the Bible, we do not know the specific time and place where the first Scripture was penned. This information is not revealed. But it was done by Moses.

The word "Bible" means books. The Bible is a collection of sixty-six books into a single book.

God's Communications

From the Bible we learn that God's first communication with mankind were verbal or oral. He spoke directly to Adam, Noah, Abraham, and other patriarchs. The first written will of God was at Sinai when Israel was encamped at the foot of the mountain and God gave tablets of stone to Moses. It was likely there and then that much of Moses' work was done, although we cannot know how much. It was here that God told Moses to write down the law God gave him by which Israel was to be led. From that time forward we have numerous writings from God. The Old Testament, from the time of Sinai through the time of Artaxerses, king of Persia at the time of Malachi around 400 B. C., the book was written. The New Testament contains records, histories, biographies, and letters by inspired men written to churches and individuals, revealing Christianity. We are not lacking for abundance of written material in the Bible.

Divisions, Writers, Languages

The Bible is divided into the two testaments, Old and New. Men have classified these books in various ways. The Hebrew Bible was divided into three categories consisting of twenty-two books; law, prophets, psalms and other writings. These twenty-two Hebrew books are the same as our thirty-nine books. The oracles of God were given to the Jews (Romans 3:2). This kind of Jewish division was recognized by Christ (Luke 24:44). There was never any quarrel between Jesus and the Jews of the first century which books belonged or what they said.

The terms "Old" and "New" do not refer to the age of the covenants. The Old was first, but was fulfilled in Christ, lasting approximately fifteen hundred years (Galatians 3:19-28; Matthew 5:17). The New was second, revealing the will of Christ, and has already lasted nearly two thousand years, five hundred years longer than did the Old. Christ, by establishing His new will, made the first old (Hebrews 8:13). He took away the first to establish

the second (Hebrews 10:9). The Old is old because it has been taken away. The New is new because it is the one of which Christ is the mediator (Hebrews 9:15), and which can accomplish what the old could not accomplish (Hebrews 7:9; Romans 8:2,3). It is new because it shall last as God's will for mankind until the return of Christ at which time we shall be judged by His Word (John 12:48). We need to understand why the Old and New Testaments are called old and new.

God used about forty different people to write the Bible, spanning a period over fifteen to sixteen hundred years. Included in the Bible are three dispensations, systems of rule by which God has governed man in the past and how He governs today. These three are, (1) Patriarchal, (2) Mosaic, and (3) Christian dispensations (Hebrews 1:1,2).

There are three languages involved in Biblical writing. Two are predominant. There is Hebrew, and almost all of the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament were originally written in Hebrew. Some small portions were in a kindred language called Aramaic. This latter tongue was a common language in Palestine starting about five hundred years before Christ. This is likely the language that Jesus often spoke. It is possible that when the New Testament speaks of the Hebrew language, Aramaic is what is meant because Aramaic was the common language of Hebrew people at the time. A few portions of the Old Testament were written in Aramaic, and few portions of the New were also in Aramaic.

The Greek language was used in writing the New Testament for the greater part. It is commonly called Koine Greek, the conversational Greek. At the time of Christ this form of Greek was an almost universal tongue. It is a dead language; no longer commonly used.

How We Got It

How did we get our present Bible? Is it accurately preserved from the ancient writings? These matters are of great importance. We can make determination from two sources called primary and secondary sources. The original writings are not available and have possibly perished. Why God did not see fit to preserve them we

know not. Could it have been that men would have made idols of them, build shrines over them, make their resting place a holy place? We do see people venerate relics of the past of far lesser significance.

Let us consider the primary sources. We are concerned with what are called manuscripts. New Testament manuscripts are in Greek and are copies of the original autographs or writings. Some forty-five hundred manuscripts of varying quantities have been found, far more than any other ancient writing. Some were copied near the date of the originals. Most include only portions of the New Testament.

There are three manuscripts that are considered of great value called the Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Alexandrian texts. While these have the edge regarding age, there is grave doubt concerning the reliability of the accuracy of these texts. But they are of great value in making comparisons and determining the text alongside the many other manuscripts. There are other sources of greater age and reliability than these, especially greater than the first two. There is abundant evidence that the first two are corrupted in many ways, and they are at variance from what can be shown from other sources.

Secondary sources include ancient translations, writings called lectionaries, and the personal writings of early Christians. If something has been translated it obviously existed prior to the translation. The oldest evidence of the contents of the autographs are from ancient versions. Lectionaries are books containing selected and special passages designed for public reading in public worship. Over eighteen hundred such writings have been found. From the letters and commentaries of early Christians, wherein is quoted so much of the Scripture, especially the New Testament, almost all of the Scriptures can be reproduced.

The vast amount of source material allows for comparisons of the texts and detection of possible human errors, such as copying errors, misspelling, and other trivial variations (such as saying "Holy, Holy, " rather than "Holy, Holy, Holy," or citing "Lord Jesus Christ" rather than "Christ Jesus the Lord."). With this

abundance the fullness and completeness as well as the accuracy of the true Biblical text can be ascertained. In less than 1/1,000ths of the New Testament text is there any substantial variation to be found at all. Even there no principle of faith or command is involved. From this vast amount of sources, nearly 20,000 documents altogether, the New Testament can be found intact, surpassing by far anything else of ancient writing. This in itself is significant.

As for the Old Testament, accuracy is no less preserved when we realize several important facts. God committed the oracles to the Jews, as noted. Jesus endorsed the Old Testament Scriptures as the Jews considered them. He usually quoted from the Greek Version of them, the Septuagint, a translation from Hebrew to Greek, compiled about two hundred fifty years before Christ. Accuracy is also verified from other versions, even Samaritan copies.

They Were Careful

When one considers the meticulous care of scribes and copyists to prevent any error, we are made all the more confident. It is some of the most interesting reading to learn of the precise methods used as they went about their work making copies of the Scriptures. From the Dead Sea Scrolls, and more recent discoveries of the oldest copies known of Isaiah and other books, over 1,000 years older than anything preciously discovered, the accuracy of the text as we have it is confirmed. Again, archeology has proven to be the friend of Scripture.

We are not confident of the accuracy and veracity of the Bible because of these findings, but because we know God is the author and preserver of His Word. But these findings are impressive upon any honest mind regarding the Bible. It makes us more assured than ever that God has, does, and will keep His promise, such as First Peter 1:25, "*The grass withereth, and flower thereof falleth away. But the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.*"

* * * * *

The Bible

NUMBER TWO

We turn our attention to what is called the authority and canonicity of the Bible. Contrary to what some have mistakenly concluded, authority and canonicity are not the same. The canon refers to those books that are accepted and recognized as belonging in the Bible. There are sixty-six such books, thirty-nine in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament. These books are included because they are authoritative. They are not authoritative because they are included. Their inclusion was based on their authority. They would have been authoritative even if men had mistakenly omitted them from the canon. They had authority before they were generally accepted. A Biblical book, since it is inspired of God (and we consider inspiration in other lessons) had authority from the moment it was written. No man gave any book of the Bible its authority. Authority is based on inspiration. Many ancient books have been written, but not all are inspired of God. The canon refers to those books which are recognized as inspired because of the evidence both within and without the Scriptures. No book is in the canon that is not authoritative and no book is authoritative simply because it is in the canon. It is in the canon because God made it authoritative by His inspiration of the writing.

By Jesus' day the canon of the Old Testament was fixed and included twenty-two Hebrew books (which correspond to our thirty-nine books). They included the law, prophets, psalms and other writings, the same material Jesus accepted (Luke 24:44). We accept what Jesus accepted when we accept the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament.

As for the New Testament, Paul's writings are called Scripture by the inspired apostle Peter (Second Peter 3:16). First Timothy 5:18 quotes Matthew 10:10 and Luke 10:7 as Scripture. This covers the vast portion of the New Testament. As for the rest of it, from history we learn that the other writings of the testament were.

looked upon by the early Christians as authoritative from the first time they appeared and were received with that respect, and read in public assemblies where Christians met for worship as the Word of God. It is false to think the church produced the Bible. Rather the Word of God produced the church, and the Bible message is that Word, the seed of the kingdom, from which the church has come and still comes. We must understand what produced what lest we credit man as the source of Scripture rather than God, and that would be the greatest mistake we could make regarding the Bible.

Before the Writing of It

Christians existed before the new covenant was written. But they did not exist before the new covenant. The word preached, believed, and obeyed produced Christians, the church. The church existed before the actual text was written, but not before the Word was revealed. It was eventually written down in its completeness. For a time God's Word was in inspired man, but now is embodied in the inspired Scripture (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."* So when we speak of the New Testament canon we simply refer to the books that even the early Christians recognized as inspired of God. From versions, lectionaries, secular histories, and personal writings and commentaries, we can know what they considered inspired. Furthermore, there are documents called catalogues that were written by early Christians that list the books accepted as Scripture long before any council met to place their stamp of approval on them.

Internal Evidence

But the strongest and most indisputable evidence is the internal evidence and claims of the books themselves. A study of evidences is itself a most valuable study that space will not permit here except to mention. We stoutly recommend you get a reliable book on Christian evidences and read and know for an irrefutable fact that

the books of the Bible are from God because the evidence is overwhelming.

Some cry, "It is not fair to use the Bible to prove itself." But it is foolish not to include the Bible in proving what it is and from whence it came. If you wished to know the contents of a bottle, would you exclude a study and investigation of the contents? Certainly not! Let us be just as open and fair with an inquiry into the Bible.

Other Books

Why does the Catholic Bible include books that our Bible excludes? Depending on the way the books are counted, there are from seven to fifteen books included in Catholic Versions of the Bible that are not found otherwise. They are called Apocryphal or doubtful books. They are additional books. For the most part these books are historical and do not and will not affect the plan of salvation.

Why are these books rejected by others and accepted by Catholics? All of them are listed with Old Testament books. They never were included in the Jewish canon, even the canon Jesus accepted. Remember it was to the Jews that the oracles were committed (Romans 3:2). The Jewish writers of the first century rejected them also. Lacking the internal evidence of inspiration, they sometimes contradicted those books that are known to be acceptable. Within them we find the foundations of such doctrines as purgatory, praying to dead saints, etc. These objections cannot be waved aside by papal decree. Even Jerome, who translated the Bible into Latin and whose version Catholics once called perfect, excludes them. Romanists are terribly inconsistent when it comes to the matter of the Apocryphal books.

There are apocryphal or doubtful books of the New Testament era as well, but none are included in the canon by anyone. The Bible is not the only ancient book that discusses some of the events recorded in the Bible. The thirty-nine books of the Old and the twenty-seven books of the New are inspired as we can surely ascertain when we study the evidence understand.

Our English Bible

We now consider the English Bible. There have been many versions in English down through the years. The first English translation or version was from the Latin by John Wycliffe in the fourteenth century.

William Tyndale in the sixteenth century also produced a version. He wrote the pope and said, "If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plow shall know more of Scripture than thou dost." His translation was from the Greek and Hebrew.

The best known and most widely used version is the King James Version of 1611. This was a work done by forty-eight choice Greek and Hebrew scholars who worked under threat of death if the text was disturbed. They looked upon the book they translated as the Word of God, not just another ancient document totally from the minds of men as is usually the case with those who produce the many modern "versions" on the market today. Some, in their feeble and frantic efforts to provide credibility for modern versions that teach fatal doctrinal error, have given themselves to trivial nit-picking objections against the KJV, most of which are cruelly and intellectually dishonest and unjust, lacking the scholastic integrity the critics profess to possess. When you read and study the King James Version you have before you a reliable and accurate revelation of the Word of God by which you can surely learn His will, and if obeyed, will take your soul to heaven. There is a place for up-dated versions, provided they translate rather than mistranslate, and provided they are versions rather than perversions. But the recent clamor for the need of a modern speech version has been highly and irrationally overblown. The contention that people cannot understand the KJV is absurd. Having taught the Bible even to six and seventh graders for years day by day in class after class from the KJV, I know there is no validity in this contention that we cannot understand it. We must remember there are those malcontent with God's revelation who prefer things new to things true.

Some consider the American Standard Version the most accurate of all English translation. What the ASV does

translate is probably very accurate. The omission of much of the text from the ASV, as it follows the Westcott-Hort Greek Text, is the prime objectionable feature of it. It is true that some of the strongest objections raised against the ASV is its literalness, which is actually not a fault but an advantage and virtue. Too many "translators" have adopted the policy that it is legitimate to simply paraphrase what they think God may have meant rather than translating what God has said. They admit their works are paraphrases, but some are intent on using them as reliable translation nonetheless. The ASV was produced by one hundred and one of the ripest Greek and Hebrew scholars ever assembled. To a great degree it preserves the beauty and style of the KJV while blending a degree of literalness without as many obsolete and archaic words as found in the KJV. But let us understand about archaic and obsolete words. They are not errors. It is far easier to define a word not currently and commonly used today than it is to explain and explain away the false doctrines included in most modern versions, such as the Revised Standard, New International, New English Bible, Good News for Modern Man, the Living Bible, Easy-to-Read Bible, and many others of similar inadequacies and errors. About the most complimentary thing that can be said of most new versions is that they are commentaries rather than reliable translations, and often some of them are ridiculous commentaries, far removed from anything akin to the message they propose to present. All kinds of denominational doctrines have been injected into the text of many modern versions that simply are not true. It is a tragedy among brethren that so many have opted for the unreliable versions produced by those who do not have respect for the inspiration of the Bible and willingly cast darts at the reliable KJV, hoping thereby to give stature to their new things. Different books will produce different people. We are witnessing such changes among us, partly because of these versions, and this is not complimentary toward brethren who promote and endorse these products called modern versions. They lead people to think these books are God's Word, but they often teach error. With some, that really does not matter, because they have already joined the ranks of those who contend the Bible only contains the Word of

God rather than believing the Bible is the Word of God, existing due to the plenary, verbal inspiration of those God chose to write it. They have decided to join the modernists who contend truth is relative and not absolute, that truth cannot really be known but is something for which we can only search. Not accepting the Bible as the Word of God, without pain of conscience they can tamper with it to suit their own whims, and accommodate the sins of our times, bringing the alleged Word of God into conformity with the way of the devil that so many are determined to follow.

Why the KJV

I generally preach from the KJV, occasionally citing the ASV for some specifics. The KJV is that with which most faithful brethren are familiar, and is translated from the same text as those European versions that produced the break from Romanism in the Protestant Reformation. It is the version most widely used in producing what we sometimes refer to as the Restoration Movement. It is a version that is accessible, accurate, and conveys the truth, only now and then needing some explanation of a few obsolete words which still are found in most complete modern English dictionaries. I strongly recommend to you the KJV and warn you of the modern versions and their doctrinal error. It can be justly added that the New King James Versions does have great merit and benefit. It is not to be classified alongside the vast array of modern products so often being used and promoted.

I suggest with equal persistence that those who promote and endorse these modern versions that have been shown over and over again to teach error do not serve well the cause of Christ by doing so. They lend themselves to the increasing Biblical ignorance, confusion, and digression which is running rampant through the Lord's church at this time, and in a society that is increasingly disrespectful of the Word and will of the Lord. They will not be counted guiltless.

* * * * *

Victory to the Faithful

At the East End congregation where I preach we have been studying the book of Revelation. It is a difficult book and with so many varied ideas floating about concerning the time it was written, the meaning of the symbols, the relevancy to our time, and other

points of difference, it really does not behoove one to become very dogmatic about the conclusions he may draw. But there is something that we can rest assured is to be learned from this book even if many other matters remain somewhat obscure and indefinite. The theme of the book emphasizes the spiritual victory that belongs to those who come to Christ and remain faithful to Him. This we know, and we rejoice. JWB

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.

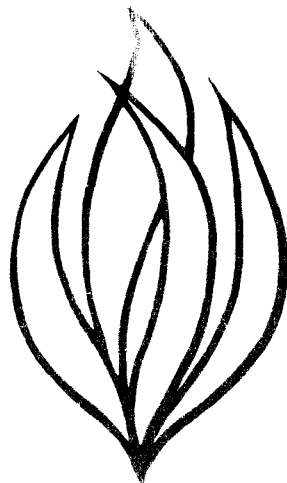
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A Burning Fire



*"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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THIS ISSUE

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The Home Church And Her Young

NUMBER ONE

We have heard the many warnings from faithful brethren who are in positions to know that the church is losing thousands of her young people every year. We have no reason to doubt the accuracy of their statements. We rather believe, however, that the home is losing the young and the church is suffering the loss. Be that as it may, we are inclined to believe that the loss of our young is possibly the greatest loss the church has suffered in the twentieth century. Estimates range from fifty to ninety per cent no longer are staying with church, depending upon the area studied. Many of those who nominally remain with the church have drifted into the worldly and liberal digression and erroneous tangents so characteristic of many churches of Christ today. This loss has become so apparent during the very years when the young would ordinarily be of college age, whether they be in college or not.

Some years ago I set out to discover what was happening to the faith of the young during college years and why the loss. More precisely, I wanted to learn what the home church could do to prevent it and recover as many as possible. I visited many campuses, both state schools and so-called "Christian" campuses, as well as other private institutions, interviewing students, preachers, teachers, counsellors, student center directors, dorm supervisors, youth workers, deans, presidents, and whoever would give me the time to discuss this matter. The answer I received from my questions were for the most part thoughtfully given because I asked them to allow me their time before I visited them, requesting they give thought to the area of investigation I was making prior to our discussion. It was usually obvious that some preparation was given to the answers to my questions.

The information I received was tremendous and the volume of it so large that all I can present in this booklet only touches the surface, but sufficiently, I believe, for us to see the nature and magnitude of the problem of losing our young. A lengthy series once appeared in the GOSPEL ADVOCATE reviewing my investigation and campus visits.

My inquiries were along four major lines of thought. (1) What are the deficiencies in attitude and knowledge among incoming freshmen and how do these change during college years? (2) What can the home church do once they are away from home to help them remain faithful? (3) What are the dangers, problems, frustrations, and most destructive influences they encounter in college environments? (4) What are the most effective means and activities for young people, what is really worthwhile, that will stabilize them in the faith? The answers varied somewhat from college to college depending on the nature of the school. But there were so many things in common with them all.

Several observations are in order. I was impressed with the value of the "Christian" schools pertaining to moral environment. I was disturbed with the glaring decline even in these areas, and particularly with the compromising, false, and liberal doctrines being taught and protected on these "Christian" campuses in recent years. It is not unfair to say that for the most part, those who sacrificed so much to bring these schools into existence have been betrayed because the very purposes for which the school was established are being buried beneath a barrage of liberal propaganda.

By noting the relatively better moral climate on "Christian" campuses, we do not demean the work done among some state college students, but the state campus is far more open, compromising, permissive, and outright rebellious toward the will of God. But even the work done among students in state schools was obviously being influenced by the liberal and worldly ways, all the way from near cultism to the "do your own thing" philosophy.

The acceptance of drugs, immorality, alcoholic beverages, co-ed dorms, immodest dress, profane speech, were much in evidence on state campuses more than elsewhere. Such an environment presents special needs for the Christian who attends them.

I was impressed with the urgency of effective work among young people. While not in total despair, I find little reason for realistic optimism, and faithful workers among the young are in near panic as the problems sweep the youth in large numbers. Many of these workers have simply resigned, even promoted the idea, to go along with the trends. Our losses are high and departures are numerous because of digressive influences within and without. Folks back home are too often not even aware of the seriousness and magnitude of the problem, resting comfortably in their naive state that things are now as they were when they went to school.

I am convinced that the young people generally do not lose their faith at college as much as having taken little faith to college with them. We are losing them before they reach college, and it only becomes glaringly evident once they are away from family influence, the home church, parental advice, but fall under the spell of their new freedoms and many are overwhelmed by the parade of self-proclaimed superiority they must endure from their professors.

It was startling to me to hear one tell me that probably less than fifteen per cent attend services regularly once they arrive on his campus. Campus workers often never have a chance to be of assistance because the youths never allow them to even know of their once-professed connection with the church. We are obviously not doing a good job prior to their leaving for college. Liberal churches that abound around campuses take advantage of this attitude, and are often successful in leading the young into religion which is not New Testament Christianity.

I am further convinced that homes and home churches are not meeting the issues, many not even being aware of them, and fewer still having knowledge how to cope with them. We must get busy doing something about that.

Unless great strides are taken among the young to return to the "old paths" the Bible teaches, having Biblical authority for what we say and do, these young will be forever lost to the cause of Christ. They may be religious, but not as the Bible teaches them to be.

Psalm 71:18, *"O God, forsake me not until I have declared thy strength unto the next generation, thy might to every one that is to come."*

The first area of questioning had to do with the deficiencies of knowledge and attitude among those entering the college years? (These things are specifically concerned with those going to college, but they are also reasonable applicable to all of that age, whether entering college or not.) They have a lack of personal conviction. They have a borrowed faith, not the real sincere acceptance of truth because they have learned it for themselves, but because they have leaned on others. This is partly their own fault, but why have they not been taught better? They have attended Bible classes and worship services, but often due to family pressure and insistence, but have never really learned and been convinced by the evidence of truth. This is either because it has not been properly presented to them, or they have been unwilling to apply it to themselves, which in many instances is the case. Generally speaking, they are Biblically ignorant. Once away from home, lacking conviction, they forsake the church.

Young people need to be asked, "What do you believe, and why?" As one has said, "God has no grandchildren." The sad fact is, parents and local brethren cannot bestow their faith on their young without the young coming to willingly believe it and knowing why. One cannot be sustained on the faith of another. We may have told the young WHAT to believe, but evidently they do not know WHY they should believe it. They remain uninformed until other influences take them away. While they are often touted as the most brilliant generation to ever come upon the scene of human history, we have strong reasons to doubt that when we observe their conduct. They are surely more ignorant of the Bible than most any generation in this century.

Interestingly, the faith among young people who come from the small, rural churches seems far stronger than those who come from the large, rich, worldly metropolitan churches. Those from mission areas have far greater faith than those where the church counts progress in numbers. This is probably because they have come from churches where conviction was taught to be necessary, not mere social acceptance. Faith among the young where there are many churches, large numbers, big money, seems to be less grounded because they are what they are because many others are what they are, but not because they are founded on "thus saith the Lord." This is no argument for small churches against large churches per se, but it is a strong indictment that churches that recognize the need for "thus saith the Lord" produce far stronger faith than the social minded, recreational, entertaining, numerically prominent, financially comfortable churches who have most likely compromised truth to gain their recognition.

We found some alarming attitudes among them. They want less "doctrine," and more social action. This they are getting from liberal churches. They have almost entirely missed the mission of Christ and the church.

They speak much of "love" but show little comprehension of what love is, as taught in Scripture. They consider it mostly an emotion and sentiment to be outwardly expressed by holding hands, closing eyes, swaying bodies, and such as that. They do not seem to recognize that love is seeking the other's highest good as God has determined that good. They act, with some exceptions, as if doctrine and love are in conflict. They fail to note the Biblical teaching that one cannot separate love from obedience to Christ's doctrine. They seem to think love allows "let me go my own way without rebuke, whatever I say, do, or want." This they receive in heavy doses from liberal churches and liberal teachers in pulpits and college classrooms. They consider doctrine as "our" doctrine while others have "their" doctrine, not realizing that the Lord's church is to produce no doctrine, but is to uphold the doctrine of Christ in our world.

They are being taught aggressively that our services are cold and irrelevant, and they are indifferent to services unless they have some kind of "charge" to them to make them feel good. They obviously do not understand the purpose and nature of worship. They are not aware of what the Bible teaches about worship, or the proper attitude toward worship, and seldom can tell you with Biblical authority what ought to be done in worship. They have drifted, with help, with the trend of emotionalism, "getting turned on with Jesus," and "feeling good," expecting something special to come upon them from the Holy Spirit, even if it has to be invented.

Characteristic of the young, they feel they simply must be accepted regardless of what they say, do, how they act, dress, or what influence they exert on others. If you do not accept them, whatever they display, you are bigoted, old-fashioned, uncaring, lacking in compassion, and cannot be trusted. They are not beyond parroting the church-bashing they hear in the schools and liberal churches. They are big on condemning those who condemn anything, denying anybody the right to "judge" anything, except for themselves. They detest any form of condemnation except what they choose to condemn.

Those who are knowledgeable of the Bible know that these views are in error and can be and have been proven fallacious. Not all have bowed the knee to Baal, but we speak generally. Most are inconsistent, and are not even aware of it. But the sad thing is that many of these have been "raised in the church," as is evidenced by their words and phrases. But respect for the Bible is so often near non-existent.

There are other attitudes of note that are more commendable. They care far less about rugs, drapes, buildings, and parking lots. They seem to be more concerned for people than steeples, even though their concern is often misdirected. Many expressed grave disgust at large expenditures for buildings in which to meet, but have more sympathy for large expenditures in which to play. I never quite got one to explain that to me. It should be evident that these large expenditures, whichever direction, have not stopped the youth drain.

The young are really repulsed by what they consider gross hypocrisy among members of the church. This probably has had a far greater impact among the young than among older members. This may be because the hypocrisy they observe is among older members, even though they fail to see the inconsistency and hypocrisy in their own peer group. Coming from youthful idealism into the world of realism shakes them. They find it hard to adjust to the reality that everybody and everything is not as professed to be. Much that they call hypocrisy, however, is actually immaturity, and the need for growth among those they criticize. They find it hard to discern the difference. Some of this will be tempered with their own maturing.

There is no excuse for hypocrisy among the young or the old. But who can deny that adults have placed many stumbling blocks in the path of youth? I heard it repeatedly said, "I'm so sick of the hypocrisy in the church." I could assure them that many others agree with them on that score. I could not get good answers from the young as to why that ought cause them to take out their anger at hypocrites against the Lord by turning away from His church.

They call the work of the church relatively unimportant and push it aside to accommodate their whims, pleasures, sports, dates, and "good times." Their religion, if it remains at all, is often a matter of convenience rather than personal conviction. All of this takes a deadly toll among them. We cannot overstate the power of example, good and bad.

What must be done is for everybody to be taught that two wrongs will not produce the right. Nobody can go to heaven on the basis of the hypocrisy of others. Who can believe we can throw out God and His Word simply because some ignore it, or even profess to follow it but do not?

Many young people are, in their words, "bored to tears" with their Bible classes in the home church. Often this is because they have no interest and concern, but often it is because the classes provided them are not conducted intelligently, by competent people, with informed

teachers, but just whoever happens to be willing to volunteer to take them. Often I had the complaint that they did not believe the elders of their home church knew what was going on in classes, and did not really put much stress on providing them the best possible teachers, and even less concern about materials. While they studied theories, math formulae, complicated data in school, they are subjected to fill-in-the-blank booklets, puzzles, catchy fictitious stories of "problem solving," dull lectures, and ill-prepared presentations. They are taught so little Bible in "Bible class" that they know little about the Bible.

I was impressed that brethren and sisters who teach must learn that the day of Saturday night preparation is over if we are going to retain our young. It never was adequate, and it is now so painfully apparent. Many rightly feel the teachers are not dedicated, are there because nobody else wants to be, therefore, are not motivated to serious thought and Biblical inquiry. Possibly, brethren, we have gone along for so long with publishing houses graduated level materials that we fail to realize how the young need to comprehend the same gospel as their parents and grandparents. Why is not a thoroughly prepared open Bible study far better than what so many are getting?

I would contend that the day of studying only what somebody else says the Bible says, through printed literature, is ineffective. Many young people told me that they wish from the fifth and sixth grade they had been given opportunity to simply study the Bible.

Another weakness in our teaching is that too often we merely relate facts without application to life of those facts. While the Bible is relevant to our age, many are never shown this relevancy, and then it becomes dull.

Unless our teaching efforts are improved, become more Biblically oriented, sharpened and brought up to their capacity of learning, we will not retard the departure of our young from the way of God, nor will we develop them in the personal conviction they must have to sustain them.

It pains me to relate how impressed I was that so many young people have abandoned a strong Biblical stand regarding worldliness. They say preaching they have heard on the subject has been vague, weak, compromising, and abstract. Therefore, they shun to condemn drinking alcoholic beverages, modern dancing, smoking, even though most question the propriety of using drugs. They are frustrated by churches that provide havens for violators of God's will by condoning worldliness. Let one church take a righteous stand and some get disgruntled over it, run away to a more permissive church, and they are received with open arms without repentance. This disgusts them. It disgusts me also.

Many have never seen the dignity of negative preaching, and clamor for only something positive. They have not been taught the whole counsel of God. They have been brainwashed into thinking condemning error is somehow a display of an ugly heart. Furthermore, often they hear the denunciation of sin from the pulpit, but see the practice of it without consequence. Eldershops have much for which to give answer along this line.

They will hear much criticism of condemnation of sins from both parents and peers. Sin may only be condemned generally, but not specifically. It is like one said concerning the statement in prayer, "Lord, forgive us our sins." He wondered what would happen if somebody said, "Name one you would admit."

The young, taking their cue from the older ones, see the fear of offending the prominent, the more wealthy, and the quest to be socially acceptable in the community. They see cowardice and fear to defend what is proclaimed, and while they do not admire that, they come to think this is the way to face error. Their stand against worldliness is so weak because they have been shown this weakness regarding it from both home and home church.

Where are the young lacking? You name it, and with many, it is lacking. I repeat, they are so Biblically ignorant. What they do know they are not well able to communicate. They know of Abraham and Moses but do

not even know who lived first, or how each fits into God's scheme of things. There is a tremendous need to emphasize the authority of the Bible, and the necessity of having Bible authority for what is taught and done. They cannot even defend the inspiration of the Bible, and this is deadly seeing how in nearly all schools there are those teaching things that would undermine that truth.

How badly they need courses that survey the themes of each book of the Bible, and how the books relate to each other, and to us. The need to know why the church is not a denomination. One administrator of a "Christian" school whose enrollment then consisted mostly from "Christian" homes, said that eighty per cent of the incoming freshmen considered the church just another denomination among denominations. On a questionnaire that asked, "Is the church of Christ a denomination?" eight of ten answered, "Yes."

The home church must turn attention to teaching the home to fulfill its duty toward the young. Rather than trying to take the place of the home with fun and games, the church needs to teach the home what members of the home should be and do. More than the local church, even more than professors, student centers, or anything else, the home must be strong in the Lord because there, more than anywhere else, is where the young are molded. The home church can help the young by helping the home help the young. It is all too evident the church in many places is losing its young because of the home rather than the church, except as the church neglects its duty in teaching, and as the home church may itself become liberal and digressive, bashing the Lord's church in favor of newness and change without regard to revealed Biblical truth.

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NUMBER TWO

I asked those with whom I discussed these matters, "What would you wish you could tell the leaders of local churches?" The attitude toward the leadership was often one of guarded respect, but almost as often, and I found

this disturbing, open rebellion and disrespect. Some even said, "Get with it or get out." They wondered why, if the church is supposed to be so important, that the leadership moved like it really was not too significant. They complained of those leaders who do not do the work, and really hinder those who want to work. While some detested what they called "hard preaching," there were others who had heard what some call "hard preaching" and wondered why the leadership was so shy, sometimes cowardly, to support preaching that was "right down the Biblical line." They expressed a concern that the leadership of local churches, generally speaking, did not take their task very seriously, or at least did not show that they did. The correctness of these views may be debated, but this is what existed among them.

As for preachers, they commented on how so many seemed to be so impressed with themselves, and so concerned about their "image," so interested in their job that they will bow and bend to whatever pressures come upon them to retain their jobs, image, and especially when they have good incomes. They said they were tired of joke telling, but the inconsistency of all this is how they will flock like birds when one of these charismatic joke tellers are speaking. It was hard to determine what some of them really were thinking. They expressed disgust toward those who they think rely on verbosity and personality to make up for their lack of study and preparation. But again, they will flock to hear and follow such preachers. These kind of comments were both encouraging, but at times very disturbing because it reflected the kind of preaching they had been hearing.

A second major area of inquiry that I made was what those I consulted believed to be profitable activities. I will be highly selective in this section and abbreviated because it would take too long to mention specific programs that were sometimes suggested. But even the young seemed to be aware that much of what many churches are doing is simply busy-work. They want what they believe to be meaningful, although most of the students found it difficult to define what they considered to be meaningful. Great numbers of them did not consider the things the Bible calls for the church to do to

be very meaningful. It was evident with some that to be meaningful meant what was exciting, fun, sensational, entertaining, and pleasing to their peers both in and out of the church. I found among several state campus works that they try to imitate the denominational student centers, even the fraternities and sororities on campus. They want to get into parades, put up cleverly worded signs in front of our buildings during school "homecoming," have rallies before ball games, etc. They obviously have never separated the work of the church from such mundane, trivial and secular matter. They really did not impress me as understanding what it the function of the Lord's church. Some want the college age people to operate under their own supervision away from the eldership, having their presidents and vice-presidents, having no real connection with the church except for the church to provide facilities, and pay the bills. What was astounding is how many adult workers among these young people go along with that approach.

When you asked them about attendance at Bible classes, worship services, special learning opportunities, they said they usually did that back home. But they are far more lax about this once they are at school. They are restless, but not for coming to a knowledge of the truth.

While there were those who expressed the above attitudes, there were others, although fewer in number, who longed for a church near campus that would provide for them opportunities to work among their fellow students, teach the distinctiveness of the church when they brought their friends to assemblies, and not just try to make everybody feel good as if they were simply "honored guests," and act as if the church was so fearful of offending that their friends could come and go and feel all was well even though they remained lost. They sometimes said they were actually ashamed of the services because leadership would allow the most incompetent song leaders to lead singing, and it sounded terrible. They asked, "Why can't we put our best foot forward for others to see what the church stands for?"

What can the home church do for their young people once they are in the college environment? To be sure, many opportunities have already been missed by that

time. Once they are away, there is less contact and less influence by the home church. But one request repeatedly heard by those who work with the students is that home churches let churches near the schools know their young people are in the area. Students often do not come to the services at all once they come to school, and brethren around these schools never have contact with them because they do not know they exist. They never can find out who they are. Religious preferences are no longer recorded at registration. Word of mouth or chance is the only way to find out who might have some contact with the church unless and until students attend the services, or the home church notifies the church near campus.

We regret that some campus works are not the kind and quality they ought to be, lacking Biblical soundness, and faithful brethren would not even want their young to be connected with the campus work. A major problem the young faithful brethren have today is finding a church reasonably near a campus that still stands forthrightly for the truth of the Bible. So many have drifted with the liberal trends and tides of the world that brethren at home had just as soon their young not be contaminated with what is being served by campus churches.

I made inquiry into what those around all these schools considered to be the greatest frustrations, problems, and most destructive influence the young encounter. Youth is a great age, but it is not easy. Social pressure was mentioned by everyone of them. Faith shaking doctrines promoted by unbelieving professors placed them at a distinct disadvantage because they are often not allowed to respond, do not have equal opportunity to state their convictions, and so often are not even prepared to defend what they say they believe. When most of the class laughs at religion and pokes fun at the church, it is difficult for the timid and shy young Christian to stand. Teachers play a deadly role. When teachers, fellow students are both against you, and you have a compromised message coming from the campus church, everything is made more difficult for our young.

Even in "Christian" schools this sophistication of "expertism" that some professors exhibit is intimidating

to many. Statements are made as if what they say is the last word when the young Christian knows that what he teaches is contrary to what the student has been taught. It is a shame and a disgraceful indictment of the "Christian" schools, in nearly every case, that they do not reenforce Biblical truth the young have learned at home and in their local church, but the teachers seem to think it is their mission in life to change the views of their students to harmonize with the seminary and theological training the teachers have absorbed while obtaining their arbitrarily determined academic degrees. It became how obviously wise it is that parents tell their young as they leave for school, even for "Christian" schools, not to swallow everything they are told. Likely as not, you will encounter false teachers at either place as quickly as one that teaches the truth.

Pressure from their peers is so tremendous it cannot be measured for its magnitude. This is why many youths get caught up in using drugs, engaging in immoralities, drinking alcohol. It is because "everybody else is doing it." Of course, everybody is not doing it, but it seems that way so often.

Intentionally, ideas are often planted in their mind to discount the Bible, question its authority and validity, and relevancy to our modern and scientific age. The fact that those who ridicule and discount the Bible know little to nothing about the Bible does not prevent them from creating problems for those who have been taught to love, respect, and study the Bible. Home churches sorely need lessons that build confidence in what the Bible claims itself to be, the Word of God.

The young are taught that the Bible is not the standard, that there really is no standard, that "if it feels good, do it," then bombarded with the temptations to do evil, and the pressures to "go along" by their peers. You can see why the Christian youth has entered a spiritually savage jungle and needs all the help he can receive.

Some brethren, trying to provide better companionship for Christians who attend the schools, have built dormitories where Christian students can live and maintain Christian standards. Too often the co-ed

dorms at state schools are nothing but state financed brothels. This may sound harsh but from what I was told, I have no reason to disbelieve it. How can they maintain any semblance of decency while living in such environments?

Our young must be assured that for every attack against God and His Word there is an answer. Even though they may not readily have the answer, and even though it may pose a difficult research to learn the answer, there is no objection against God and His Word for which God has not provided an answer that refutes error. Of this our young need to be assured, and therefore, need to not be humiliated nor afraid to stand for what they have been taught by faithful brethren to be the truth. Truth can be defended, and there are those capable of defending it. So often attackers will not allow opportunities for their edicts of error to be questioned or challenged. They make their high-toned pronouncements and demand everybody accept them, even contending that anybody with a brain will readily swallow everything the college professor tells them because he is smart. Our young need to know they have no obligation to accept that sinister attack on truth.

As would be expected, there is the problem of dress and appearance. Some of the worst looking human beings I have ever seen were walking about the campuses of what were supposed to be prestigious institutions of learning. No only are so many so sloppy, reflecting a lack of self respect, but immodesty is the rule rather than the norm in some of the places I visited. One student told me he had known many students, but never had known a boy with long hair or a girl with a mini-skirt who did not seriously lack self respect or a sense of responsibility for their appearance and influence. Another commented, "You can cut the hair and lengthen the skirt, but it takes longer to change the heart that has allowed it." Just why young Christians wish to ape the lowest and most base elements of society is inexplicable. It reflects that they did not learn much of the way of Christ at home or from the home church, and they are not getting much from the church near the campus. How the church needs to teach the young to be models of Christianity, not mockers of it!

Brethren who contend appearances are merely innocent fads, passing quirks, are blind to the realities of atheistic and social revolution in our society and the influence it has had on molding the mind, values, attitudes, and hearts of the young, even in the church. We are fools to shut our eyes to the realities of evil that surround our youth.

There are other problems young people face that threaten and upset their spiritual balance. There is the pressure of time, the establishment of priorities, the shock of the largeness of the schools they enter, the impersonal qualities of campus existence, becoming a number on a card, the loss of individual concern everybody needs.

This emphasizes all the more the need for establishing contact with faithful churches near campuses, if they exist. If that does not occur early, they may soon begin to think it does not matter. They turn to do whatever they wish and get lost in the crowd. Even on campuses of schools operated by Christians they are shocked by things that are wrong. Because of this they are subject to becoming cynical against everything called "Christian."

No campus is perfect. There are problems on all of them. But the campuses where Christian principles are at least verbalized and do not condone such things as drug abuse, immorality, profanity, and other evils so obvious in the world, may prove worth the cost and effort. The present problem in "Christian" schools is their adoption of liberalism and digression. And it is existent in every "Christian" school, and rampant and dominant in most of them.

I found it generally true that concern for the individual student is more apparent on "Christian" campuses than on state campuses. Unless you do something that is illegal, the administrators in state schools generally keep hands off. Only when someone is caught violating civil law do they get involved. All kinds of Satanic movements are found there, and that some of these are found on "Christian" campuses is even more disturbing.

While the picture is generally bleak and discouraging, we must mention other pressures that make life for the college person rather difficult. He and she face such things as military service, who to marry, life's profession, even what will be their major, as well as meeting the financial responsibilities of getting their education. All these things make an impact on their attitudes and lives. Decisions regarding money, jobs, friends, acceptance, convenience, family, the world generally, takes its toll. The young must learn to include God in every choice in life, usually in an environment where God is declared irrelevant.

The impact of coming into an environment where immorality is often so prevalent and accepted is greater than folks back home realize. There is the accumulation of youthful passion, a sense of independence and freedom from parental supervision, escape from preaching against the wickedness of immorality, and the urging to "do your own thing." I got the distinct impression from those I interviewed that on some campuses it was almost a wide open society where anything goes. Placing a youth in that setting who has been taught to have respect for right and wrong can be a very tremendous shock to them.

Often their problems are created, or at least aggravated, by their home. Family conflicts, complaints about money, making the young feel guilty like he is imposing on parents because he is costing so much only adds to his frustration. Cars, money, late hours have proven deadly to many students. Young people are like springs coiled to expand. Hold them down until the moment you must let go and they spring out of control. Let them expand gradually, and under control, and when the time comes to remove your hand, they stand on their own.

I never did discover why another two problems exist and are so demanding, but almost all of the young mentioned them both. There is pressure to (1) conform to the crowd around them, and (2) be sure you become different from people back home. This is neither wise nor reasonable to think either pressure brings good necessarily. Whether one should conform to others must be determined by the truth. Whether to be different from folks back home

should be determined the same way. But they are brain washed into thinking they are not really educated unless they throw away whatever those who love them most have taught them in the past.

Advisors of the young told me there were five very vulnerable types of young people being knocked off track once they get away from home into the college environment. (1) Those who have been overprotected and never given opportunity to exercise the power of choice, how to choose, what to choose, seldom trusted, and given few responsibilities, everything done for them, and escaped discipline. (2) Those who were forced to do this or that, even regarding the church, without ever being benefited with explanations and reasons why. (3) Those very subject to pressure, who lack personal conviction because of lack of knowledge. (4) Those who have been prominent in high school activities and are often disillusioned because they are not so suddenly prominent of college campus. They often pay a terrible price seeking that prominence. (5) These who have been granted too much freedom at home, being either allowed or forced to be an adult before they were capable of dealing with adult situations, physically, intellectually, financially, and spiritually.

Now that we have considered some of these matters, what do we do with all of this? Only a portion of information I learned has been included, but enough for us to draw some conclusions about what we must do in the interest of the young and their relationship to the church.

Is this information merely interesting to us, or do we care enough to want to do something for the young that will really help keep them faithful to Christ? This is an important decision each congregation must make, and this means each individual should be concerned.

I pursued this investigation with the lofty expectation that we all can profit from what is discovered. I would hope that the local church would make better efforts to provide a solid, grounded spiritual foundation for the young under its influence. We desperately need people who will give themselves to the task of devising courses

of study that will prepare the youth for what is before them. We need first rate people to help them be first rate Christians. We must provide qualified teachers for them so they can teach and show the young what Christians are supposed to be.

We need those who will guide, plan, promote activities that are truly effective. This takes time, thought, and money. It cannot be done haphazardly.

We must get an "away-from-home" department for our young. This must be overseen by dedicated and informed people. The home church must keep in touch with them, and the churches near the schools also.

More than anything else, possibly, we must put an emphasis on teaching the home regarding parental responsibility for the young, and teach the young "thus saith the Lord." Our teaching and preaching must be the kind God wants, as Scripture reveals, in message and content. We must expose them to the truth, and warn them of the error, if we expect them to believe and obey truth. How can they take convictions to school with them if we have not shown them the right way?

We must learn to listen to what they tell us. They can inform us of their needs sometimes far better than we can know by mere observation, or trying to recall how it was when we went to school. Today's students face things the older generation never faced, at least not as openly, defiantly, and rebelliously against God as things are today. Our task is before us. Our young are depending on us. We need parents and home churches that really care, and will act aggressively. Can you think of any other way we can keep from losing our most cherished possession, our young people?

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It is not an encouraging factor to realize how faithful brethren have been betrayed by so many of the schools upon which brethren once could rely.

Religion With “Kicks”

A vast, almost innumerable host of people are looking for their “kicks” today. They are seeking what they consider pleasurable, however temporary, something exciting, sensational, highly charged emotionally, rousing and radical. They are looking for escape mechanisms from the pressures of life, trying to find some meaning to their existence, looking for the new, exhilarating, daring and stimulating. They are trying fast cars, drugs, sexual orgies, wild “music,” rioting, imitation of degenerate movies, weird dress, almost anything one can conceive in order to “add gusto to life.”

Life has gone sour, flat, stale, and boring to many people. Many have had too much money, too much leisure, too little understanding of the sacredness and purpose of life. They have no firm foundation on which to build life, and therefore the problems of life overwhelm them as a roaring high tide. For decades people have been bombarded with the idea, and many have accepted it, that matter is the only reality, “man is the most,” having things is success, that we are but animals, having no purpose, coming from nowhere by chance, here for nothing, no guidelines by which to live, no way to determine right from wrong, and going nowhere but to the grave. They have lost, or probably never possessed, any true perspective of life and the dignity of the human being. People have, therefore, felt they must pour some meaning into life because “you go around only once,” and “you must get all you can from it.” So they do weird, wild, reckless, irresponsible things to add some color and depth to an otherwise drab and shallow existence. They suffer from the frustrations that are bound within them that is the result of a life separated from God.

Seek Escapes

In recent years there have been scores who have not turned to drugs and the other sinful “escapes” that dominate the scene, but seek a religious experience of

some sort, some explosion within them. They look for their "kicks" from religion. This has been evident from the pew to the pulpit. They seek a religion that "moves the feet, turns you on, blows your mind." These are the terms that are heard among them. They shout and roll and lose control, as if they have become possessed by some electrical spirit from "out there" somewhere. This has often been attributed to a warm, moving experience where the Holy Spirit "shakes you loose and leaves you limp." In religion many are seeking and inventing the new, untried, fancy, bazaar, strange, even to the lascivious to relate to youth and get the "fire of life." They want that which "makes you feel good and makes you cry at the same time."

While we would agree there is no personal value to what can be called a hand-me-down religion, a borrowed faith that is impersonal and meaningless (many have this kind of religion because they have neither learned what nor why they believe), we would condemn the use of religion as a substitute for other sources of "kicks." This is certainly to miss true Christianity. Getting "kicks" does not solve problems nor save souls. As much as anything else, it only complicates matters, deceiving and deluding people into thinking they have something when all they have is the passing wind of fad and foolishness.

The Wild Way

The wild religion of "kicks" gets so much attention today. A truly pious Christian who goes about life serving God, attending to his duties, imitating Christ in his conduct toward others, seldom is recognized. But let some young blood with hair like a savage paint a cross on the windscreen of his motorcycle, or write "turn on with Jesus" across a dirty T-shirt, the cameras being to whirl, and the writers run to their typewriters providing great notoriety, and presenting such as that as the "benefits" of Christianity. The distortions and misrepresentations of the faith of Christ are blazed in neon lights, pictured in fashion of white buck shoes, half nude bodies, even rock music, drug smoke, and leather jackets. This is profitable "box office" and sells books, magazines, and movies because it is sensational. It attracts the Biblically ignorant, and thrills people

who are seeking something and are willing to accept most anything that relieves their dullness, doldrums, and boredom, turning on emotions. Such is the appeal of the bumper sticker, "Honk, if you love Jesus," and explains the popularity of the song, "Jesus Christ, Superstar," a blasphemous document if ever one existed. All of this creates a new kind of so-called Christianity that kicks, swings, rocks, and wows. It reflects the idea that the Holy Spirit "zaps" people into this conduct. That such has little to no resemblance to New Testament truth is of no consequence to most. Though some of these extremes are not generally practiced, this mania for a theatrical religion has its traces among some brethren who cater to the will of "baby boomers" who want their religion to provide fun and excitement. It conforms to the Jesus freaks, holy rollers, and similar tribes. This circus type of promotion of religion in the character of showmanship and entertainment is artificially created, consists of environments designed to arouse, and exploit even those who may have a zeal, but who are without knowledge.

Jesus' Attitude

Jesus was very impatient with people who wanted a "kicky" religion. Consider Luke 11:19, *"And when the people were gathered thick together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall be no sign given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet."* Here were the big crowds, wanting the spectacular, sensational, and dramatic. He had healed, fed the hungry, and other things, and had taught them. They had come to see more signs, to be fed, seeking excitement and to get their "kicks." He looked upon them with pity and rejection.

Jesus' attitude is also revealed in the record of Luke sixteen about the rich man and Lazarus. Remember how the rich man said, *"Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment."* But Abraham told him, *"They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them."* The rich man continued to plead, *"Nay, father Abraham; but if one went unto them from the dead,*

they will repent." Abraham answered, *"If they hear not Moses, and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."* The rich man wanted his brothers to have something special, something different and new. Do you see the lesson? Jesus rejects a "faith" that must constantly have special "kicks" and signs, by-passing the Word that calls for the conversion of the heart. Some wish to replace the Word with a super-duper episode, and scenes of sensationalism.

People who want something spectacular, some highly emotional experience that they think can be traced to the Almighty are in the class as Herod, Luke 23:8, *"And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him, and he hoped to have seen some miracles done by him."* When Jesus refused, they mocked the Lord.

Blasphemous

This so-called opera, "Jesus Christ, Superstar," caught the "kick" idea, having Herod to say, "Prove to me that you're no fool, walk across my swimming pool." To think that some brethren cannot even see fault in such things as this show is a sad commentary on their spirituality. But some still make similar demands of Jesus today. Jesus rejected people who followed Him who were simply looking for the sensational and uncommon.

If you are looking for signs, wonders, and similar things regarding the identity of Jesus and His way, your search is over when you open your Bible. You will find more than enough evidence to create faith and prove the truth about Him. But if you seek more, as some young people were once advised on the campus of Abilene by their speaker, "How about a good old-fashioned sign?" (and his suggestion was greeted with applause), you will be disappointed. In the Bible you see the creation of the universe and all therein. You read of the destruction of evil at the time of the flood. You find the mighty miracles of the prophets of the Old Testament. Moses did them, as did Elijah, Jonah, and others. You read of the miraculous birth of Jesus by the virgin Mary, as well as His resurrection. You see the sign of the prophet Jonah

(Matthew 12:40) that confirms His identity as the Son of God (Romans 1:4). You will know of the confirmation of the gospel by the things done by the apostles and others to whom miraculous powers were given (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:1-4). You want signs? God has given them and tells you about them in His Word (Second Timothy 3:16,17). You want "kicks," drama, sensationalism, emotionalism, fun, excitement, a supercharged thrill that turns you on, you will not find that in Christ and His faith. His religion does not provide such things. That comes from another and opposite source. All this "Let's get excited" approach only proves that some confuse excitement for genuine zeal, and reflects their lack of comprehension of the gospel. He will not turn your water into wine, nor perform some miraculous feat. He has already done that. Jesus warns you that you are moving toward the day of judgment and says, "*Repent... or perish.*" He tells all of us to come to Him for salvation, or be lost forever.

The Right Way

If you believe and obey His Word, follow Him in life. He will forgive your sins, make you a new creature, grant you fellowship and oneness with Deity, and will give you light through His Word for the journey of life that leads into the Eternal City where the redeemed rejoice.

Those who refuse to believe and obey on the testimony of the inspired Word of God, who keep wanting a religion of "kicks," thrills, excitement, and theatrical emotionalism, who thereby show a disregard and contempt for the divinely given record about Christ, will not be satisfied with what they learn from Scripture, nor shall they receive what they pursue. His way is one of joy, but also discipline and self-control. He does not encourage people to "shake loose and let go." His is the way of faith and conviction, not fun, frolic, and confusion. We have no business wanting a religion with "kicks." We should seek the religion of Christ and be converted to Him by faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ, rising from the watery grave to live His way.

* * * * *

He Followed Faulty Counsel

When Rehoboam was approached by tribes led by Jeroboam, they sought not rebellion, but relief from excessive burdens imposed upon them by Rehoboam's father, Solomon. Rehoboam sought the counsel of age, wisdom, and experience who urged him to conform to their reasonable requests. Evidently, he did not like what he heard and sought other advice from his young peers who insisted he move in the opposite direction. Rehoboam, preferring youthful nonsense to the wisdom of age, foolishly followed bad advice to the destruction of the unity of the nation. Though hard for some to grasp, wisdom of age is worth considering.

The Last Word

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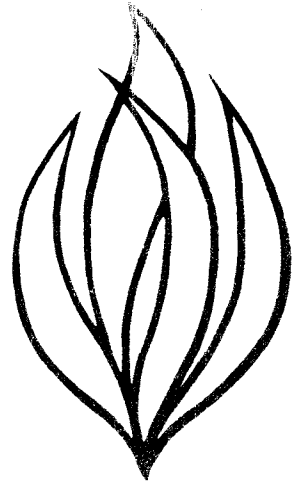
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A Burning Fire



*"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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The Christian's Relationship to the World

When two people choose each other as companions in marriage, their relationship to each other changes immediately and permanently. The husband now has new responsibilities and duties as does the wife. Failure by either of them to assume and properly discharge those duties is to bring havoc upon that new relationship. The husband must provide for his wife and the wife is to be subject to her husband *"as the church is subject to Christ."* Certain privileges as well as duties belong to each them when they consent to the vows of matrimony. This is a part of the relationship. The point we stress is that their relationship to each other has changes when they marry.

Marriage not only changes their relationship to each other, but changes their relationship to everyone else as well, including parents. Their relationship toward all others of the opposite sex also changes. The married person no longer has the right to date others as before. Because one's obligations to one's mate take first place, others are never more than in a secondary relationship.

The figure of marriage is used in Scripture to teach what happens when one becomes a Christian. In baptism we are wedded to Christ and our relationships change (Romans 7:1-4; Ephesians 5:22,23). Our relationship changes with respect to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Whereas we were children of the devil because of sin, now being forgiven, we are children of God. Previously being alienated from Christ, we are now added to the body of Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God, the Bible.

One essential point we must understand is that Christians are expected to be good, but just being good without changing our relationship to Deity does not bring salvation. Before the spiritual blessings are ours to

enjoy we must be "*in Christ*" where God provides them (Ephesians 1:3).

Not only does one change relationship with Deity when he becomes a Christian, but he also has a change of relationship to the world. He is still one who is in the world in the sense that this is where he exists, but he is not of the world in the sense that his way of life is not worldly (John 15:19; 17:15,16; First John 2:15). Even though he is still surrounded by worldly people, worldly things, worldly activities, his allegiance does not belong to the world, but to the Lord.

The World

What do we mean by the term "world?" There are several meanings of this word in the Bible, and the meaning can be determined as one examines the context in which it is used. The "world" may refer to the earth, or this planet. Acts 17:24, "*God made the world and all things therein.*" Similarly, Mark 16:15, "*Go ye into all the world...*" Becoming a Christian does not change one's relationship to the "world" in this sense. We remain on this planet as before.

"World" may refer to earthly goods. Matthew 16:26, "*What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world...*" The Christian has an obligation in this "world" to earn so as to provide for his own (First Timothy 5:8), give to the cause of the Lord, help those less fortunate, and demonstrate proper stewardship. He is to "*labor, working with his hands the thing that is good that he may have whereof to give to him that hath need.*" (Ephesians 4:28). There is nothing inherently evil with material possessions per se. But the Christian must remain the master of his goods lest his goods become his master. We are to use such things to "*lay up treasures in heaven.*" (Matthew 6:19).

"World" may also refer to the human race, the people who live on this planet. John 3:16, "*For God so loved the world...*" means God loved the people of the world, or humanity, and made provision for their salvation.

"World" also means the evil that is so characteristic of this world and many people in it. It refers to that spiritual sphere of evil (First John 2:15), the evil order, that which is opposed to God. John 14:30, Satan is called the "*prince of the world*." Those whose allegiance is given to that which God declares to be sinful are those in the "world" in this sense. It is this meaning that we have in mind when we speak of the Christian's relationship to the "world" and how it changes upon coming to Christ.

Our Duty

The Christian has the responsibility to separate himself from the world. This does not mean he must leave the planet, or live a monastic life, never using material goods, or denying himself contact with humanity. He must, however, separate himself from rebellion against God, the willful practice of sin, abstaining from practices that are condemned, withdrawing himself from influences tending to draw him from the ways of God. He cannot imitate sinful ways and be faithful to Christ.

This demands that he give heed to Second Corinthians 6:17,18, "*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.*" James 1:27 admonishes that we be "*unspotted from the world.*" This same idea is presented in First Thessalonians 5:22, "*Abstain from all appearance of evil.*"

In light of such Biblical teaching, how can anyone honestly contend that the Christian can persist in drinking alcoholic beverages, engaging in the modern dances, lying, smoking, using profanity, being dishonest, and "*such like*"? (Galatians 5:19-21). There is no defense for such behavior. Unfortunately, there are those in the church who would argue that these things are innocent and in harmony with living a Christlike life. Such an attitude toward the "world" is a shame of our time.

Not of the World

To help us understand better, think of Jesus. He was human, but He was not of this "world." He was distinct,

different, and separate from sinful practices (Hebrews 4:15). Even when He went where sinners were, it was not to "go along" with them in their sin, but to teach them the way of righteousness. He never compromised God's will to make something evil appear to be acceptable. He also expects those who claim to be His disciples to do as much. We are to be a "*peculiar people*" (Titus 2:14) who deny ungodliness and worldly lusts.

Consider the word "church." We speak of that which Christ built, and that of which He is the head, that which was purchased with His blood. The word means "the called out." Those who compose the church are those who have been called out of sin into fellowship with Deity as the redeemed. We have been delivered out of darkness and translated into the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). Even though the church is in the world in one sense, it is not to be like the world in another sense. The more like the world the church becomes the more the church loses its distinctiveness and appeal. It sacrifices its right to exist. Like a boat on a lake, it is one thing for the boat to be in the lake, but quite another for the lake to get into the boat. It is one thing for the church to be in the world, but when the world begins to get into the church we have trouble. Faithful brethren will not stand idly by and allow worldly attitudes and practices to be characteristic of the church without fighting against the evil and contending for righteousness.

As a Marriage

Go back to the marriage illustration that Scripture gives. Before marriage the woman could choose any man she wished to be her companion. But once she was married, she is committed to her husband so long as they both shall live. Likewise, before we are saved by the blood of Christ, we may choose whatever works of the flesh and sin we wish, reaping the consequences of doing so. But once one has come to Christ he is not at liberty to follow after such things. Second Corinthians 5:15, "*And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.*" First Corinthians 6:19,20, "*Ye are bought with a price... ye are not your own.*"

In addition to being separate from the world, the Christian assumes solemn responsibilities to the world. We have the duty to educate the people of the world of their lost condition and how they can be saved by Christ. We once were lost and are now saved. We have the duty to seek and save the lost as did Christ. Have you ever thought what might be your spiritual condition if nobody had ever cared for your soul enough to educate you regarding the gospel? Are we not obligated to show as much love and concern for someone yet lost as has been shown to us?

A Difference

Specifically, we have the duty to live the way of the Lord, and to live our faith. In this we are like Christ. Acts 1:1, *"The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach."* He is our example and we are live according to the way He taught. There is little doubt that more of us need to be impressed with our duty to live our faith. There are things God expects us to do, such as worship, help the needy, be as we ought to be at home, on the job, in all areas of life's activities, how we rear our children, where we go, what we say, how we treat other people. Matthew 5:16, *"Even so let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* People will size up the way of Christ, so to speak, by the way we who profess to be Christians, live. They need a demonstration before them. We are the first, and possibly the only, epistle that some will ever read.

When others see our indifference, neglect, absenteeism from worship, participation in things of the sinful world that are off limits to Christians, observe our disrespect for the law, our homes broken and shattered by strife and divorce like the world, do you think they are going to be impressed with either us or the way of Christ that we say we have adopted? Will they not think that being a Christian amounts to very little?

As much and more than other places there ought to be the an exemplary life of a Christian demonstrated in the home. There is to be love in the home, genuine concern for each other, duties discharged, cooperation, harmony,

and spiritual interest. Many husbands and wives must not have been married by a preacher or a Justice of the Peace, but rather the Secretary of War. Homes are not supposed to be battlegrounds. Using the words of James, "*My brethren, these things ought no so to be.*" Little wonder many young people grow up confused, unable to have a proper home of their own. They have never seen the home demonstrated the way God wants it. It has been said of the way of Christ, "If you love it, live it."

Preaching the Word

Accompanying our manner of life must be preaching the Word of life. The church is the brotherhood of soul winners. Preaching and teaching should be done with love and a sense of urgency. The doctrine of Christ cannot be pushed aside by promotions of entertainment, recreation, fun and games, politics, human theologies, philosophies, psychology, and the like. Only the gospel will save (Romans 1:16). We cannot win souls with gymnasiums, soup kitchens, prizes, various gimmicks that have captured the emphasis of many. The gospel, the whole counsel of God, book, chapter, verse presentation of truth is what is vital and indispensable. Trying to make people feel better about themselves even still remaining in sin, making life more joyful, getting them excited and emotionally stirred is not what the world must hear from God's people. They must hear the Word so they can believe and give heed to the Word.

Separate and Educate

Separate and educate is the Christian's duty to the world. Being the salt of the earth, the light of the world in the darkness of sin, as a city set on a hill are Biblical descriptions of the noble obligations we have to discharge. Before we can do our duty toward God regarding our duty toward the world we must leave the sinful world. This is accomplished by the power of the blood of Christ. We receive forgiveness of sins and enter into the saved relationship with Deity when we hear, believe, and obey the Word of truth.

* * * * *

Forgiveness

Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). The wages of sin is spiritual death or eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23; Second Thessalonians 1:9). The same truth is taught in James 1:13-15. Man in sin is unacceptable to God, lost, condemned, doomed, damned, helpless, and hopeless, and can never see the glories of heaven as he is. God has warned man of this since Eden. Yet, we all sin (Romans 3:10, 23; 5:12). When man recognizes these facts and desires to be acceptable to God, if he has the right spirit about him, he seeks forgiveness from God for his sins, and forgiveness from his fellowmen when he sins against them.

How could we possibly overemphasize the importance of forgiveness? It cannot be done to the person who wants to be saved. Sin destroys, but *"God... being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity and destroyed them not."* (Psalm 78:38). The benefit of forgiveness is preservation, not destruction.

Matthew eighteen contains the parable of the unmerciful servant who was forgiven, but who would not forgive. Forgiveness means release from a debt we could not pay. Forgiveness covers our sins. Psalm 85:2, *"Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people; thou hast covered all their sin."*

Blessing of Forgiveness

We are highly favored when forgiven. Paul quoted Psalm 31:1,2 in Romans 4:7,8. *"Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."* Forgiveness brings joy. Matthew 9:2, *"So, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee."* You will recall the rejoicing of the man from Ethiopian upon his baptism when his sins were forgiven. Whereas sin brings one spiritual death, forgiveness makes one spiritually alive. Colossians 2:13, *"And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having*

forgiven you all trespasses." Forgiveness of sins, that which separated us from God, means sins are blotted out (Acts 3:19). Psalm 51:9, *"Hide thy face from my sins and blot out all mine iniquities."* To blot out means to erase and make as if never done. Hebrews 10:17 tells us He remembers our sins no more.

Obviously salvation is dependent on the remission of sins. Luke 1:77, speaking of the mission of Christ, teaches that Christ came *"to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins."*

Source of Sin and Forgiveness

Satan is the source of sin, and man is tempted to sin, and does sin. But God is the source of forgiveness of sin. All sin is against God because sin is the transgression of God's law (First John 3:4). Yet, God is willing to forgive, even though He is the offended one. The attitude of God toward the sinner is seen in several verses. Second Peter 3:9 tells us God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should repent. Jeremiah 33:8, *"And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity whereby they have sinned against me; and I will pardon their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against me."* Psalm 86:5, *"For thou, Lord, art good and ready to forgive and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee."* Psalm 103:4, *"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases."* Psalm 130:4, *"But there is forgiveness with thee."* Daniel 9:7, *"To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him."* Micah 7:18, *"Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy."*

When Peter spoke to Ananias and Saphirra he showed God as the source of forgiveness and that their sin, though a lie unto men, was a lie unto the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). The willingness of Christ to forgive is evidenced in His prayer over Jerusalem. Matthew 23:37, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen*

gathereth her chickens under her wing, and ye would not." Ephesians 4:32, *"God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you."* The Lord's attitude toward the sinner is significant when we consider our own attitude toward those who sin against us.

A Gift

It is God who has made provision for the forgiveness of sins. Man cannot atone for his own transgressions, but salvation is a gift (Ephesians 2:8,9; Romans 6:23). The mission of Christ was to save sinners (First Timothy 1:15; Luke 19:10). Christ is the provided atonement (Romans 5:11). First John 2:2, *"And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world."* By His blood we are forgiven (Hebrews 9:12,22; Ephesians 1:7; Matthew 26:28).

Furthermore, forgiveness and salvation from sin is made possible and available only in Christ (Acts 4:12; 13:38; Luke 24:47; First John 2:12; Romans 8:1; Ephesians 1:3; Second Timothy 2:10). This is the gospel message. Forgiveness and Christ cannot be separated. Without Him there is no such thing as forgiveness of sin.

While God is willing to forgive, and has provided the way of forgiveness, even the power of forgiveness, making forgiveness available to all mankind, one may never be forgiven even though it is a gift. It is a gift given and received on certain conditions. There is a giver of the gift, but there must also be a willing receiver of the gift. Acts 26:18 teaches that forgiveness is conditioned upon the opening of the eyes to the truth, turning from darkness to light, away from the power of Satan and to God. The principle is clearly stated in Second Chronicles 7:14, *"If my people, which are called by my name... shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."* Matthew 4:12 states the conditional nature of forgiveness in general terms of seeing and perceiving, hearing and understanding, turning from sin. More specifically, Acts 10:43, *"...whosoever shall believe in him shall receive remission of sins."* Romans 3:25, speaking of Christ, *"Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation*

through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God." There is also the condition of repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38). *"Then Peter said unto them, Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins."* Obedience to these conditions initiates one into the spiritual realm of spiritual life called repeatedly in Scripture as being "*in Christ*" where salvation is (Second Timothy 2:10).

Once in Christ we are cleansed, sanctified, and our past sins held against us no more (Hebrews 10:8; Second Peter 1:9). When we sin, even though we are Christians, we will not live a life of sin (Romans 6:9), but will be faithful to Christ (Romans 6:1,2). It is not impossible for us to sin, but it is inconsistent and incompatible for us to live a life of sin. In this sense we cannot keep on sinning (First John 3:9). But we dare not contend that as Christians we never sin (First John 1:8,10). There are simply too many revelations in the Bible of Christians sinning to ever deny that possibility and probability.

But when we sin we can be forgiven of sin. But, again, it is conditional. Acts 8:22 teaches one must repent and pray. First John 1:9 teaches we must confess our sins. This is not the way one is forgiven who has never been baptized into Christ, but the way one who has been baptized into Christ is forgiven of sins committed once he is in Christ. John says we must "*walk in the light as he is in the light*", (First John 1:7), denoting the manner of life we are expected to live as Christians.

Attitude Toward Others Counts

Please note further God's attitude toward sinners with respect to forgiving them. Did not Jesus pray, "*Father, forgive them...*" (Luke 23:34)? He desired forgiveness even of His bitterest enemies. It was not a prayer that they would be forgiven apart from meeting the conditions later proclaimed in the gospel, but that they might have and take advantage of opportunities to meet those conditions. But does not this show us conclusively God's attitude, His willingness toward those who offend through sin?

Matthew 6:12,15, *"And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors... 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."* Colossians 2:13, *"Forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."* Ephesians 4:32, *"Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."* Do not these passages teach us what our attitude should be toward those who have trespassed against us? Inasmuch as we look to God for forgiveness, should we not also be willing to be forgiving? I never knew a person who sinned against me who was worth the loss of my soul by my unwillingness to forgive.

We must develop the spirit possessed by Stephen. Acts 7:60, *"And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."* Paul, who was certainly one of those for whom Stephen prayed, having suffered much persecution because of his life of service in Christ, also prayed as he neared the end of his way, *"At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men have forsaken me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge."* We must be as Paul admonished the Corinthians to be toward a brother who had sinned but later repented. Second Corinthians 2:7, *"So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow."*

The one who nurses grudges, unwilling to forgive, destroys the very bridge over which he must cross to enter heaven. Mercy, grace, sympathy, compassion, and genuine Christian love are those good qualities that serve to motivate the child of God to hold and manifest a forgiving spirit. Such a spirit is essential in being forgiven of our own sins.

What Limit?

There should be no limit to our willingness to forgive. Matthew 18:21, *"Then Peter came to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto*

thee, Until seven times, but until seventy times seven." Luke 17:3,4, "Take heed to yourselves; If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him, and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn against to thee saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him."

We are not responsible for one who will not repent, even though we can encourage him to do so. His sin cannot be forgiven unless he does repent. God does not forgive those who will not repent, but is always willing and ready to forgive the penitent. There is no limit placed on how many times He will forgive. Nor should there be a limit with us toward those who truly repent. The one who sins has a duty to see the evil of his way and turn from it. But the one sinned against has the duty to be forgiving when he does turn away from his sins.

May it be, therefore, that we will see our own need of forgiveness from God, seek forgiveness, receive the gift of forgiveness by meeting the conditions of forgiveness, then live a life in an attitude of forgiveness toward others even as the Lord did toward us.

* * * * *

The Christian and His Country

Those of us who live in the United States live in a land that has been bountifully blessed. We are citizens. **What** does the Bible teach about our relationship and duty to the nation in which live? While we know the faith of Christ causes us to look toward heaven, it also governs how we live in this life, and deals with matters of life, even our citizenship in an earthly kingdom.

Under the Mosaic system under of Israel lived there was what we would call today the union of church and state. The law of Moses regulated spiritual, civic, and domestic

matters, including religious service, civil duties and privileges, and personal matters. Christ authorized the recognition of the distinction between church and state. Matthew 22:21, *"Render therefore unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's."* We sustain different relationships toward government and toward God. They are separate one from the other, although all things are governed by duty to God. The kingdom of Christ is not an earthly kingdom like those of this world. His is a spiritual kingdom. When Jesus was before Pilate He affirmed, John 18:36, *"My kingdom is not of this world."* There are two kinds of kingdoms, one earthly, the other spiritual. But they are not the same, not united, but separate.

Ordained of God

Civil government is ordained of God. Romans 13:1-6, *"Let every soul be subject unto the higher power. For there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same, for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain, for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but for conscience sake. For this cause pay ye tribute also; for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing."* God has not ordained any one particular kind of civil government, but He has ordained that there be regulatory forces over society, without which there could not exist civilized society. Obviously, God is more pleased with a system of government that would be favorable to His spiritual kingdom than one that would suppress it and be antagonistic toward it.

There is another divinely ordained government, however. That is the Lord's church, His spiritual kingdom. It is different from the civil government. Matthew 16:16-19 shows us how the Lord uses the terms "church" and "kingdom" interchangeably. Those in the

church have been *"delivered... from the power of darkness and... translated... into the kingdom of his dear Son."* (Colossians 1:13). This spiritual government is regulated by spiritual laws of the New Testament. It has a spiritual mission of glorifying God and saving souls from sin, being the pillar and ground of God's spiritual truth, conducting its spiritual warfare against the forces of spiritual wickedness with spiritual weaponry. It spreads its borders and defends itself by the *"sword of the Spirit which is the word of God."* (Ephesians 6:17). It seeks to convert the heart and mind, and thereby the life of human beings into the service of man's Creator and Judge. Other weaponry consists of truth, righteousness, the gospel faith, salvation (Ephesians 6).

They Operate Differently

Civil government is different in nature, purpose, means of operation, and laws under which it operates from the spiritual kingdom. It is an oft-committed error to take laws that apply to one and impose them on the other. The same can be said regarding the home. These three divinely instituted institutions, the civil government, the home, and the church, are not equated, but each has its distinctive purpose and operation.

The Sermon of the Mount, the law of the spiritual kingdom, cannot be used as the standard and criteria for the conduct of civil government. Civil government has the right to use physical force to enforce its authority, defend itself, and protect its existence (Romans 13:4). But this is not so concerning the church. The civil government has the right to wield the sword, an instrument of death, and carry out what we call capital punishment, but not so in the home or the church. John 18:36 shows not only a different nature of the kingdoms, but the approved right of the civil government to use force. That which civil government is ordained to do is morally right before God. God has never ordained and approved what is immoral. The idea that "all human government is evil" is a false doctrine. Those attending to the proper functions of government are doing what God wills to be done. The state is out of place to invade the spiritual realm and the church is out of place to attempt to regulate the appointments reserved for civil

government. These two divinely appointed kingdoms have their divinely appointed work, purpose, and methods of operation and they are not the same nor should we try to operate them the same. Too often, neither the government nor the church is tending to the business God has appointed them to do.

Citizens of Both

The Christian is a citizen of both kingdoms. Paul was a Christian, but also a Roman. This dual citizenship contains the potential of conflict, but not necessarily so. In many nations the laws of men have made it difficult for Christians. But the Christian has duties to both governments, receiving benefits from both. He is also allowed privileges from both. Regarding civil government there are some things we must do, some things we may do, some things the government may allow or even command that Christians cannot do.

Christians are directed to pay taxes (Romans 13:6,7; Matthew 22:21). They are taught to obey the laws of the land and submit to the authority of those in civil power (Romans 13:1,5; First Peter 2:13,14). The Christian enjoys protection from the lawless because he is a citizen of the earthly kingdom over which civil rulers reign (Romans 13:3,4; First Peter 2:14). This protection is for all citizens, not just for the Christian. The Christian enjoys this benefit, not because he is a Christian, but because he is a citizen of the earthly power. Those enforcing civil law are doing what God requires. This is not an evil and sinful work, and those involved do not sin as they do what God requires.

Christians are to pray for their leaders that we might live quiet and peaceful lives (First Timothy 2:1,2). The prayer of a righteous man availeth much (James 5:16). Christians cannot do all that the government may permit because the government will allow many things that God says are sinful, such as drinking alcoholic beverages, divorce for any and no cause, gambling, etc. Just because something is legal does not mean it is approved of God. God never sanctions what is immoral. But the Christian must live within the limitations of legality nonetheless, with one exception.

Which Has Priority of Allegiance?

The Christian cannot do anything required by civil government that requires him to violate and disobey the law of God. Men make civil laws. God made spiritual laws. Our first allegiance is to God (Matthew 6:33). In Acts 5:29 we read where the apostles, though commanded by earthly authorities to cease preaching the gospel, responded that they would obey God rather than men. Here is where conflict between the two kingdoms may arise. For the government to require what God disallows, or forbid what God commands, is to step outside its ordained authority. While we cannot disobey laws that we simply do not like, we must ignore laws, commands, and orders that demand we violate God's law.

There are privileges the civil government may allow that are indifferent as far as being faithful to God is concerned. They are neither spiritually right or wrong. Voting is one such privilege. Christians may vote or they may choose not to vote. Either way no sin is involved. However, the influence of Christian people might make society better and produce leaders of better quality if they would exercise their influence by the use of this privilege. All nations do not allow its citizens such a privilege as we possibly too often take for granted.

We may hold public office. Erastus was a chamberlain, the treasurer of the city (Romans 16:23). Nothing is even suggested that the Ethiopian had to resign his post as a government official upon coming to Christ. Cornelius was a Roman soldier and nothing is suggested of his resignation. There were Christians in Caesar's household, official government people. When John the Baptist, in his work of preparing the way for the kingdom, responded to the inquiries of soldiers what they must do, he responded in such fashion that they could remain soldiers because they were not to take advantage of others and be content with their wages (Luke 3:14). Those that obeyed his instructions would be prepared for the kingdom of the Lord.

A Real Problem

One of the most controversial areas regarding the Christian and civil government is whether he can serve as a soldier or policeman. While this involves relatively few, it is an important matter. Just what governmental people will we allow, and which ones shall we disallow? What of the teachers, clerks, tax collectors, and many elected or appointed officials who are government workers? May they serve or must they remove themselves from all government service? Can one be a postman, or a fireman?

The Scriptures teach that God has ordained government (Romans 13), and has given government certain necessary functions for orderly society, even the right to use physical force to this end, and they are God's ministers in this. Is it sinful for one to do what God has made necessary? Are only the servants of the devil to serve in government as God's ministers? If so, which servants of the devil? Should he be a Hitler, or should he be a good, moral non-Christian? Where is the authority for your answer? It is a strange doctrine that says only the servants of the devil can do God's work and forbid that work to God's own people.

It is in this area that many make the mistake of taking the laws governing God's spiritual kingdom and try to impose them on the operation of civil government. My oldest son once asked me, when he became aware of the doctrine that only non-Christians can serve in government to enforce the laws of the land, what would happen if we were successful and converted everybody, but a few evil people. Just who would enforce the laws against the evil ones, which is the function of government? This is a question those who contend Christians cannot be policemen and soldiers need to face. Has God ordained something that, of necessity, demands that some must be lost in order to do what He has constructed and made necessary? We do not believe this for a moment. We must remember the difference in the functions of the two kingdoms.

Christian Citizens

The best citizen in any country is the Christian. This is because he will obey the laws, work for morality and

righteousness which exalts a nation. He is a living demonstration of good citizenship. Proverbs 14:34, "*Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.*" The Christian helps his country best by being righteous and promoting God's righteousness.

God expects us to be loyal, law-abiding, interested supporters of our nation as our nation does what it is ordained of God to do. This becomes a problem as government more and more assumes what it was never intended to assume. It also is difficult when the laws of the land continually defy the laws of God.

If we are a part of governmental service, we should discharge our duty to the nation to the very best of our ability. But always keep in mind that spiritual salvation and the spiritual kingdom comes first. We must be in the spiritual kingdom to be saved for salvation is in it.

* * * * *

God's Will and Capital Punishment

All preaching must rely on God's Word as final authority. This is true on the subject of capital punishment. This theme is widely discussed, and Christians must know the will of God regarding it. Ignorance of God's will leads to disregard of its solemn demands, will allow mankind to drift on the sea of sentimentality rather than be firmly anchored in the harbor of truth.

Capital punishment means, as the Latin signifies, punishment which takes the head. It means death to the convicted violator of law. It means the life of the offender is justifiably taken by duly ordained authority, which is civil government, and his life is forfeited as punishment for his crime. It does not refer to taking life illegally or without authority, as individuals taking matters into their own hands for revenge, lynch mobs,

etc. It refers to that which is executed by government according to authorized procedures.

Genesis 9:5,6, *"And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man: at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man."*

After the flood at the time of Noah, before the thunder and lightning that accompanied the giving of the Mosaic Law, God expressed His attitude toward capital punishment, especially when the crime committed was murder. There is nothing in this command that implies, explains, or infers the principle was merely a local, national, or temporary principle. This was not given to any one special nation but to all people. We shall show this principle applies under the guidance of the New Testament.

The Reason Behind It

The reason for capital punishment is because of the dignity and sacredness of human life. *"For in the image of God made he man."* Those who do not respect the dignity and sacredness of human life and take life forfeit their right to live. Just so long as man is in the image of God will this law of capital punishment be the will of God. Only when the reason for it becomes untrue will the law become invalid. Ironical as it may appear, God grants the right to take life from those who do not respect human life. It is a law designed to protect life by removing from life those who do not have proper respect for human life.

There are those who oppose capital punishment. They have various reasons which, upon close scrutiny, prove to lack validity. History reveals a fluctuating sentiment regarding capital punishment. Presently, it seems to flow against it. For nearly two hundred years our government practiced capital punishment, and still allows it in extreme instances. It was accepted in every responsible mind as legal, civil, moral, and recognized as constitutional. Now, it is questioned and in many

ways human life is disposed without fear of severe recriminations. Divine law has not changed on this point. Even our Constitution has not changed. But man's unwillingness to abide by the law has changed.

In our present world we have conditions of permissiveness and distortion of law even by judicial authorities. Many think it is their duty to overturn whatever has been before their own time. Protection for morality and human dignity has been virtually destroyed, just as it was with Judah and Northern Israel before the fall of those nations. Filth is denied to be filth. Drunkenness is considered a mere disease. Pornography is called art. Profanity runs at high tide. Freedom is interpreted to be license. Marriage and the home are under attack as archaic institutions. We live in a time where the "woes" of God apply. Isaiah 5:20, *"Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter."*

Government Often Fails Us

Our courts have become so lenient with the criminal and indifferent to the rights of actual and potential victims. Even the slightest clerical miscues can allow a vicious savage criminal go free after arrogantly and defiantly committing crime after crime against innocent people. Such is the reality of our present nation. Only God knows where this degeneracy in high and low places will take us, and how long He will permit His blessings to flow in spite of our sinfulness. But this we do know. Regardless of man's thinking, God's will remains unchanged. God's standard of morality does not vary with the customs of man nor are they affected by human sentimentality, pseudo-intellectualism, and the misrepresentations of love.

What About "Kill?"

Some argue that the Ten Commandments say, *"Thou shalt not kill."* This is true. Yet, the same God, to the same people, under the same authority commissioned death for certain crimes. The commandment did not forbid capital punishment. It does not forbid taking

human life in all circumstances. What is forbidden is murder, not merely the taking of human life. All killing of humans is not murder. People die as a result of accidents, self-defense, even in war.

There are seven Hebrew words translated "kill." There are at least that many in Greek. But one word in particular is used when the command not to kill is given and that is the word meaning murder. This does not forbid legal, moral, often commanded executions, whether in the line of law enforcement or national preservation. Punitive killing by proper authorities is not murder. We have no right to close our eyes to this reality and truth if we really want to know what the will of God is. You may oppose capital punishment if you choose, but you will have to find other grounds than, *"Thou shalt not kill."*

Some argue that the possibility of an innocent one being executed should remove capital punishment altogether. We must grant that possibly, even with all precautions that can be taken, innocent ones may die. That such has happened we cannot deny. But the abuse and misuse of capital punishment, and the change of human error was just as great as when God gave the law. But He still gave it. The possibility of human error is not sufficient to repeal or dismiss, set aside or ignore divine will. The abuse of a thing does not dispose of the valid use of a thing. God's law allowing capital punishment remains firmly entrenched.

A Secondary Purpose

Some contend it does not deter crime. This may well have some validity. (It is practiced so inconsistently and infrequently, how could one know?) Only proper teaching that changes the hearts of men can really prevent and deter crime, although the fear of punishment does tend to deter crime. Remove all punishments for all crimes and you will soon see that punishment does deter crime. But capital punishment is not primarily a deterrent to crime, but a punishment for crime. Since much crime is committed by repeaters, it would deter them once they were executed. Even the warnings of hell do not keep some people from sinning.

but hell is a deterrent, but more a punishment. The same is true with capital punishment. One reason capital punishment is not more effective as a deterrent is because it is not practiced consistently, persistently, and with reasonable speed. Read Ecclesiastes 8:11. The legal "red tape," weak administration of criminal law, emphasis on the "rights" of criminals rather than the "wrongs" of criminals and the "rights" of victims has destroyed much of the criminal's fear of punishment, especially capital punishment. Our laws and officials allow indefinite appeals from decisions and convictions of guilt. Some crimes have gone unpunished for years on end even though the criminal has been convicted and the penalty specified. This is why capital punishment "does not work." Misnamed mercy has become an excuse for calamitous injustice that tends to encourage and even condone crime. It is even the case quite often that the news media makes martyrs of criminals as they face their just due. What kind of society have we become?

The United States reels and sways under the affect of drug addiction and similar crimes. In some countries, where the death penalty is exacted for drug peddling illicitly, the use of drugs is minimal. Does not this demonstrate the invalidity of the claim that the death penalty does not deter crime? It would be a blessing if our nation adopted the death penalty for a number of crimes. This would cleanse the nation of much dross. Nations where capital punishment is reasonably and speedily executed without the endless wrangles over irrelevant matters, murder is ten times less prevalent per capita than in our "enlightened" and permissive society. But capital punishment is primarily to punish. The deterrent to crime that certainly follows is a beneficial by-product.

It Is Unloving?

Some contend capital punishment is against Christian love. They think it is inhumane, lacking compassion, even racist. But the same God who ordains capital punishment is the author of love. When considering love, why should we not consider love for God, love for truth, love for justice, love for victims, love for the innocent, love for the potential victims. Why is the only

love some consider is their misguided and misdirected, misinformed and malpracticed "love" toward those who have shown no love toward their fellowman? It is not love to give license to evil, encourage it, or condone it. It is not love to remain passive as wickedness runs rampant over the land, subverting male and female, rich and poor, young and old. Love for the criminal is not the all-transcending love. There are others loves that take priority over indulgence of those who decide to criminalize society.

Every passage, without exception, that is used to reject capital punishment, legal coercive force, defensive warfare, self-defense, is in the context of forbidding personal vengeance and retaliation, prohibiting one from taking the law into one's own hands. Or the passage refers to the operation of God's spiritual kingdom, not the operation of God ordained civil government. To apply any passage in this fashion is to misapply it.

Wasn't That Under the Old Law?

But some complain that Genesis 9:5,6 was before Christ. What about under Christ? The New Testament affirms this same position of capital punishment. Note closely. Matthew 26:52-54, after Peter has used his sword, cutting off the ear of the servant of the high priest, Jesus told him to put the sword in its place because it was not Peter's prerogative to take the law into his own hands. He did not say there was no place for the sword to be used. In fact, Paul affirms the sword is borne by civil government properly. The sword represented the power to kill. But Christ told Peter to sheath it because he did not have the right to use it. What Peter was trying to do was out of place at that time because Scripture was being fulfilled. The sword was not to be used for personal retaliation, lest those who so use it also perish in the same manner.

Romans 13:1-7 shows government ordained of God can use the sword and does not bear it in vain. This as a specific ordination by God for government to use physical power, such as the sword, an instrument of death, to enforce its laws and preserve its control. God

never gave government the right to do something immoral, but He did ordain capital punishment by the civil authorities. Christians are to support the government in that practice.

Acts twenty-one and twenty-three was an instance where the power of the sword was employed for the protection of Paul. Paul never denounced its use nor intimated the sinfulness of those who used it simply because they used it. Paul was not one to do wrong or allow wrong so good might come.

Acts 25:10,11, while pleading innocent of violations, Paul said he was willing to die if guilty as charged. He did not suggest the government did not have the right to take his life if he was guilty, but showed his willingness to submit to the right government had.

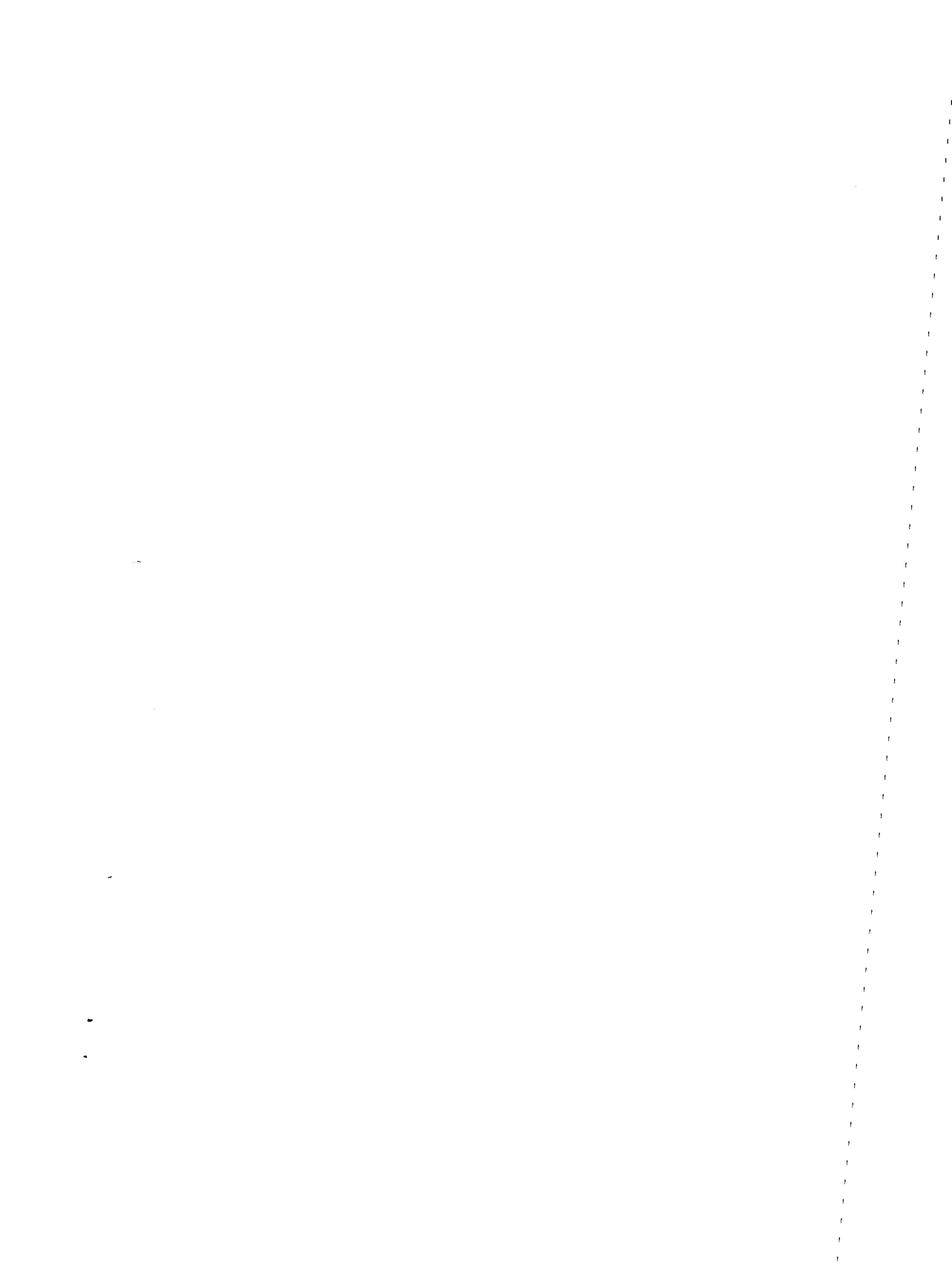
Regarding the persecutors of the church, Revelation 13:10, the principle is again affirmed. Such power is not for personal vengeance, but it is the tool of the vengeance of God, as taught in Romans 12:19.

The Real Question

We have sympathy for those who commit crimes that properly call for their death. But our sympathy, or lack of it, is not the question here. Whatever nations may do regarding capital punishment is one thing. But there is no room for doubt regarding God's will. His will remains as expressed near the beginning of human existence. His law is still in force and will remain so even if men and nations resist it. We only prove ourselves fools to think we know better about such things than the One who gave us all things. Unless and until we properly apply the rules God has decreed, we shall continue to sow the wind and reap the whirlwind. We are seeing the tragic results in our own society and in our own day of the disavowal of the propriety of capital punishment.

* * * * *

I am aware that some object to points made on the subjects in this edition. But just because some object is no reason to set truth aside.



Listen to the Right One

People seek advice. When they have problems, face challenges, get opportunities, they seek advice. So often people get bad advice because they simply have sought it from the wrong ones. They listen to the wrong people. Why listen to those who show no love for God, morality, the Bible, the church, and expect them to tell you the way you ought to go? God sent His Son into the world for a number of purposes, among them, to be an example for us to follow (1 Pet. 2:21). What's the matter with some of us? Isn't the Christ good enough to guide us anymore? Do we know someone better? Nobody will do better than to listen to God's Word.

The Last Word

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

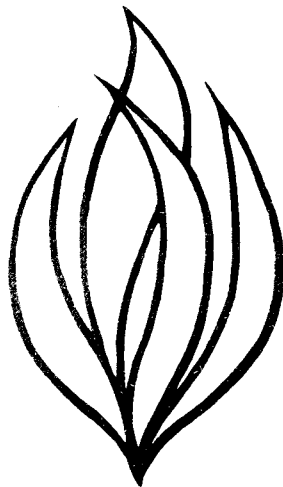
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A Burning Fire



*"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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Attitude Toward False Doctrines and False Teachers

The Christian can expect to encounter many problems as he tries to live according to the doctrine of Christ. There are few problems that give the Christian more concern or requires more thought than what his attitude and action should be toward those who teach false doctrines, whether in or out of the church.

The problems regarding those outside the body of Christ are more easily understood than when such exists inside the body. Ephesians 5:11, *"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."* Second Corinthians 6:14-16, *"Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them and walk in them,, and I will be their God and they shall be my people. Wherefore come ye out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."* But the attitude and action of the Christian toward false doctrines among brethren is where the gravest portions of the problem really lie because the false teachers are in the same spiritual family, the church.

Why the Concern?

Why should we be concerned about this? It is because false doctrines destroy, and that is all they can do. Truth is what saves (John 8:32). Christ warned against false doctrines. Matthew 16:6,11,12, *"Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees*

and of the Saducess. How is it that ye do not understand that I spake it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Saducees? Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Saducees." Again in Matthew 15:9, *"But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."* Paul also warned, Galatians 1:8,9, *"But though we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed."* Scriptures that condemn false doctrines can be multiplied in their reading. There are few, if any, who would contend false doctrines are good, but there are those who think it makes little difference.

First Corinthians 5:6,7, when Paul was dealing with false ways, *"...Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened."* To allow false doctrines to go without opposition is to invite rebellion against the truth. Galatians 5:9, *"A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."* Paul's attitude toward those who taught falsely in the church was stated in Galatians 2:5, *"To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you."*

False Ways Often Followed

That false ways are often followed is evident from observation of history and present society when these ways are compared with what God has declared to be true and false. That even the church is subject to following false ways is evident from the history of the church, plus the many warnings that are repeatedly given in the New Testament against false doctrines and false teachers.

How is it that the church, the very institution God set to be the pillar and ground of the truth, can become involved in and even overcome by false doctrines? As we analyze the apostasy which Paul prophesied in First Timothy four and First Thessalonians two, we see that God's people were led away from the truth a step at a

time, bit by bit, a little here, little there, steps ever so slight, so slight that they went undetected by inattentive Christians. We know the church did fall away. We are not to think that the Lord's church fell away in a single bound by one big step, or even a few steps. Such was not the case. But we know the difference between the New Testament church and the ecclesiastical system of Romanism that existed in the dark ages. The difference is glaring. But we are not to think what was erroneously called Christianity took that leap from truth in one giant bound. Paul warned how the apostasy would come. First Timothy 4:1, *"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times, some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils..."* Notice, not all would depart at once, but it would begin with SOME departing, first a few, then more and more. Acts 20:28-30, Paul speaking to the overseers of the church of Ephesus, *"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you not sparing the flock, also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."* That is how apostasy became a reality. The attitude toward error was one of tolerance as it grew.

In The History of Israel

As one gazes into the pages of the Old Testament and sees God's chosen nation, Israel, we see time and time again they worshipped idols and committed other acts of abomination. We are made to wonder how such a people who had been exposed to God's truth could ever reach such a state! It was because of their **peers, prophets, princes, priests, and people** (and if like today, we could add **professors**). They were like peas in the same pod, rebellious against God's authority. Their neighbors influenced them and they failed to adhere closely to what God's Word commanded. They did not jump into such a deplorable state with one leap, but gradually drifted into it. As Jesus said, *"If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."* (Matthew 15:14). This is exactly what happened.

What Must Be Done

When error arises, the first thing to be done is to make an attempt to correct it. This is the right attitude toward it. Error is not corrected by simply denying it exists. It takes more than a simple decree that evil is good for it to be good. It takes Biblical evidence, Biblical teaching, to prove the correctness of any doctrine or practice. Too often the standard used during the gradual digression is simply discovering what most are doing rather than what the Bible teaches. Truth is not determined by counting noses. When evidence and teaching is presented to show a matter to be wrong, that evidence and the force of it ought to be accepted, or the evidence itself discredited by Scripture. We should make efforts to correct what is wrong. But when you are denied that opportunity, and the truth is ignored, and there are such times, do we just go along with it anyway, to keep peace and fellowship? **Absolutely not!**

As we seek the Christlike attitude toward false doctrines and false teachers, especially among brethren, we must consider Second John 9-11. *"Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine,, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed. For he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds."* The doctrine or teaching of Christ is possessive phrase, meaning the teaching or doctrine that is of, comes from, belongs to, and by the authority of Christ. We are forbidden to bid Godspeed to those who teach outside that realm or body of truth. We are forbidden to approve of the course such teachers pursue and promote. We have a responsibility in what we encourage and endorse. We become guilty of sin by promoting things that have been proven to lead the church into error. John again warned, *"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world."* By what standard do we try, prove, put to the test, what we hear? Can it be anything other than the all-sufficient Scriptures? (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Second Peter 2:1,2, *"But there were false prophets also among the people even as there shall be false teachers among you, who*

privily bring is damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that brought them and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of." It is an unfortunate fact of life that many are led away by false doctrines and false teachers.

Are False Teachers Honest?

This is not to say that all who teach error, nor all who follow error, are deliberately and necessarily dishonest and desire to defy God. Such may well be the case with some, possibly most, but certainly not all. Saul of Tarsus was a demonstration of honesty in error, as was Apollos. Some are simply lacking knowledge of what the Bible teaches, and do not see the trends of events. Too often brethren are like the pig that the farmer easily led to the slaughter by dropping grains of corn just in front of the pig. The pig, never looking up to see where he was going, grabbed each kernel, one at a time, until he was led to his doom. The fact that people can be honest and sincere and still be wrong is well established by Scripture. They are still wrong, and none ought presume such could not be the case with himself. There is a way to know whether you are believing truth or error, and that is by measuring by the Word. That is the only way.

Often brethren are led away by well-meaning friends and lifetime associates. We are influenced by the so-called scholars, by our children, marriages, and by those with charismatic personalities. Some can have error pointed out to them, but because of those who are involved in it, they remain reluctant to oppose it. That is a case of dishonesty. True enough, opposition to false doctrine may well cost friends, even family. You may run aground with those who profess to be "somewhat." Paul warned the Galatians that they were "*bewitched*," meaning they were deceived. They were not stupid, but they had not opened their eyes and used their knowledge in detecting which direction they were going, and what they were supporting. It was far more deadly than they realized. If they had been more cautious, and remained loyal to the Word that had been proved before them, they would not have found themselves in the absurd position which Paul noted. He called them "*foolish Galatians*,"

not because of hatred for them (which is never the right attitude toward those who hold error), but in his determined attempt to keep them from pursuing a path that would inevitably lead where they did not want to go. They had been subjected to an influence that seemed innocent on the surface, an influence that even contained some truth, but an influence that was taking the church away from the pure and noble standard of truth, an influence that eventually subverted most of the church of the first century, at least the churches of which we read in the New Testament.

Deception

The early and ancient church was deceived into accepting error by being overwhelmed with the magnetism of personalities that mixed large portions of truth with smaller portions of error, enough truth to entice brethren to support and rely upon them, and enough error that it eventually so poisoned the church that it fell away. How relevant this is in the church now!

Who would like to drink a large, cool, refreshing looking drink that had only one trouble with it, that trouble being that it contained a small portion of deadly poison, enough to kill? People can be deceived to think they are doing no harm in what they do, support, and encourage because there is also some good presented alongside it. But it is folly to shut one's eyes to the overall direction and trend many promoters and promotions are taking the Lord's church today. It is not wrong to urge an attitude of caution, and reject that which is not sound according to "*thus saith the Lord.*"

If Acquilla and Priscilla had possessed the same attitude toward error some "loving" brethren possess today, they would never have bothered with correcting Apollos and his imperfect message in Acts eighteen. Apollos was still teaching the validity of John's baptism after it was no longer valid. Did that matter? He taught a lot of truth regarding Christ. He was mighty in the Scriptures. But if false portions of his message had not been corrected, it would have subverted the souls of many everywhere it was believed. Fortunately, Apollos accepted the truth when it was presented, which proves his honesty.

Everyone does not accept truth when presented. But what if he just continued to ignore the truth? Would that have mattered? Some today do not seem to think so. Certainly it would have mattered. It would have been improper and unloving for brethren to support him just because he taught some truth alongside his error.

There is no way to misunderstand what the Holy Spirit teaches regarding false teachers who do not turn from their error. Understanding is not the problem regarding Romans 16:17, 18 and Second Thessalonians 3:6, and similar instructions. Accepting truth and being honest with what the Word teaches is the problem. Many are just dishonest with the truth.

We Need Paul's Attitude

Paul wrote how he was often in many perils of various sorts, one of which was being in perils of false brethren (Second Corinthians 11:26). Paul warned Timothy, Second Timothy 4:1-5, *"I charge thee therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing, preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."* One can easily see in our time how those who warn of liberalism, modernism, worldliness, unauthorized activities, are maligned, ridiculed, berated, and disparaged by the very ones who loudly claim a superiority in love and piety. It does not take a church historian or a so-called Biblical scholar to know that the church today is not near so informed in the Bible as in past years. Brethren on the whole are less determined to insist on *"thus saith the Lord"* for what they do, teach, and practice. Many shun doing battle even when necessary in order to preserve faithfulness. Too many are simply willing to compromise, surrender, or go along quietly with error and those who promote it.

That is not the right attitude toward false doctrines and false teachers. Thankfully, all are not that way.

When Change is Calamity

Some have claimed the change of attitude in the church toward truth and error is wholesome, maturing, coming of age, and a demonstration of love and tolerance. The change in attitude toward error is none of those things. God's Word says God hates every false way (Psalm 119:104). Shall we do otherwise? Shall we allow ourselves to drift? Many have not come of age, matured, shown love, but only learned to tolerate error.

Let me be specific in one area so we can understand what I mean. Consider the difference between the Christian Church and the Lord's church. They are glaring and numerous. It was not always as obvious. At first, the difference was serious because it pertained to the matter of authority and respect for it. But there were few manifestations of it. But as time passed, more and more it was evident that people considered the Bible differently. Then we saw the rise of the missionary society, then instrumental music, and from there came women in the places of authority, women preachers, change in local government, observance of "holy days," cooperation and acceptance of denominations, open membership, doing more and more unauthorized things, denial of the necessity of baptism, even denial of verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture. Digression produced another denomination.

It did not start out to do that, nor was that the intent. It began with a compromising attitude toward the mixture of error and truth, a tolerance of false doctrines and false teachers. People failed to commend what Scripture commends and failed to condemn what Scripture condemns. They followed the lead and influence of those who advocated digressive words and ways, leaving the "*thus saith the Lord*" position, which is the only attitude one can acceptably have toward everything. In time, division occurred, a division that could have been avoided if more brethren had "blown the whistle" on digression and false teachers, and more would have respected God's will above their own.

History Is Repeating Itself

We are experiencing similar things in churches of Christ today that disrupt unity, fellowship, and growth. Many have changed their attitude toward authority, the work of the church, worship, worldliness, and decided it best to have peace without truth. There will be souls in hell that could have been saved, because they have spent their energies and talents promoting and condoning what it not according the Scripture. Many others, who might have been saved, will never know the truth because the message they hear is distorted and perverted. As in Paul's day when the "*mystery of iniquity*" was already at work, it is at work in our own day, being led by colleges that uphold false doctrines and false teachers, weak and fearful elderships, the large, monied, worldly, compromising churches with their highly financed clergymen and staffs. The list of false doctrines grows in length with each step they take.

As in yesteryear, those who warn of apostasy are called everything ugly, even by those who claim to have the loving piety that rivals that of Christ. But let us not think false doctrines and false teachers can be ignored. To be friends with God's enemies is treason. Christ did not ignore them, but fought against them. So must we.

Only truth will make us free. God's Word is truth. Addition or subtraction perverts the clear stream of saving truth. While we must work in growing in grace and knowledge, we must remain alert to search the Scriptures to determine what is true, diligently standing for the right, and just as diligently resisting the false doctrines and false teachers who have risen among God's people. Anything less is to fail in loyal service to the Christ who died for us. This is the right attitude that we must possess without fail, and act accordingly.

* * * * *

This lesson is somewhat longer than most that appear in *A Burning Fire*. But few lessons are needed more than the sentiments of this one.

We Can Know Truth

John 8:32, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

John 17:17, " Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

Second Timothy 2:15, "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."

Hebrews 1:1,2, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in the these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds."

We have only one primary point to make in this lesson. As surely as God is, as surely as He has spoken, we can know the truth if we will study the Word of God. It is not a matter of guesswork or mere probability, but knowledge of the Bible is knowledge of the truth. The Bible is the source of truth regarding God and man's relationship to Him. We can know what that truth is.

The Bible claims to be God's Word (Second Timothy 3:16,17). If it is not, we have no reason to place confidence in anything else revealed therein. We are aware that the religion of Christ has many deadly enemies. They exist both in and out of the church. Those who would be faithful to Christ have the privilege and duty to present the truth, preach it, and defend it against its enemies. *"Preach the word; be instant, in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."* (Second Timothy 4:2). *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* (Mark 16:15). Paul said he was set for the defense of the gospel (Philippians 1:17). God has given us armor with which to do battle (Ephesians 6), and to *"contend earnestly for the faith"* (Jude 3). Beware of any who would say that the truth needs no defense or that the truth will defend

itself. We are confident that none can crush truth forever. But we have the obligation to defend it.

Against Truth

It has become the wail and cry of liberals and other antagonists against the truth in their efforts to blunt the defenses of the truth to say the truth needs no defense. They do not believe what they are saying because what they are saying is what they believe to be the truth, and they are vigorously prosecuting and defending their views. But they would hope to dampen the enthusiasm of those who are determined to defend God's truth by persuading that truth needs no defense. They would prefer to be set loose and allowed to run free of opposition to their error.

Another plea of the enemies of truth is that we never can really be sure just what the truth is, we cannot really know it for sure, we can only continue to search for it, but never can ascertain whether we have it. They will condescend only to the point that we might be able to come to what is most probable, but never really know. This is nothing less than blatant agnosticism, and it is even being preached by some of the better known names among the ranks of the Lord's church. Pathetically, even though this charge has been repeatedly proven, there are some weak and wobbly members who do not grasp the seriousness of the contention that we cannot know the truth. Unwittingly, many are advancing the cause of Satan by refusing to reject the agnostics in the church.

Enemies of Truth

We inquire, "Who is the greatest enemy of the truth?" Some might say the scientists. Some scientists are surely anti-Christ, anti-God, anti-everything true according to God's book. But true science is no enemy of the truth. Science deals with the physical, weights, observable data. But the religion of Christ is concerned with spirit, soul, heart, mind, matters beyond the reach of science to study and measure. The proven facts of science have proven to be a friend of the Bible. We need not set aside one proven scientific fact to accept the Bible. There are some atheistic theories we cannot

accept, but these theories are really nothing more than the hypotheses of unbelieving people whose claim is only the expression of what they wish was true. Even though the Bible is not a scientific book, there is no truth of science that contradicts it.

Some people have developed philosophies that counter the Bible, such as the anti-God philosophy of Humanism, based on evolution, and that all things are here as the result of some undesigned, unplanned, unexplainable naturalistic accident. The problem Christian people face is that these false philosophies are taught far and wide as if they were true, even though the proponents of them will not place them on the line for fair and honorable investigation. Science and the Bible agree. Philosophies of men and the Bible often differ. Misunderstanding of the Bible and science will differ. But God's works (the world that science studies) and God's Word (the Bible) are harmonious, as we would expect them to be. But these claims of unbelievers are so persistent that many are asking, as did Pilate, "*What is the truth?*"

Is It Absolute?

Some would tell us that there is no way to know absolute truth, that there is no absolute truth, there is no right or wrong, but that everything is relative, and truth is only as you have personally experienced it, being determined by how you feel about it. They say we can only search for truth and must accept as fact that we cannot find that for which we search. Some say you cannot prove the truth, but only believe it, and that you must go by your feelings, or, if religious, you must have some kind of "encounter" with Christ. They deny the Bible is God's truth, but only a means of having this "encounter," and you can come to Christ without the Bible, the church, or any such thing. We might as well face reality, and not just brush these contentions aside because they are being taught on every level of education, over television, in religion, even by some misguided professors in colleges operated by brethren who supposedly love the truth. One has even taught that we cannot prove with certainty that Christianity is the true religion of God, but that it is only the most reasonable, and most likely did come

from God. Just why such people are tolerated in Bible departments is without good sense. Why churches support programs that produce such agnosticism and destruction of faith is evidence of the grave apostasy that has swept many so-called "Churches of Christ."

Under the banner of academic freedom, every kind of faith-destroying theory is being sown in the hearts of the young, even by brethren. When the Scripture is cited to refute their error, they cry, "That is just your interpretation." They do not really believe the Bible is the standard by which to prove what is right and wrong. Once such things were heard only from modernists and denominational seminaries, but now, since so many of "our professors" have become scholars from these seminaries, we hear in classrooms and pulpits this same truth-denying philosophy. Why administrators do not stop it can only be explained by recognizing how they are more concerned with the school being accepted by the academic community than they are interested in the truth of God. Why elders allow such people to preach is beyond explanation.

"What It Means to Me"

Attempts are made to make the Bible mean most anything somebody wants it to mean. Ask them where they get such ideas, and time and time again they will cite some professors in whose class they studied. There they heard, "Evidence does not really prove." There they were taught that evidence proves only if and when the mind accepts the truth. What ridiculous anti-God nonsense! Evidence proves and truth is truth whether anybody ever accepts it. This simply destroys confidence in the reliability of the Bible and dims the light for our path. It would mean that we can never be sure about anything and must be embarrassingly apologetic about everything that we have thought was true. It destroys the Bible as the standard of authority. It makes every man his own god and lawgiver.

If these silly but collegiate contentions are true, what are we doing here on earth anyway? Why are we concerned about right and wrong, Christ and the soul? What difference does it make whether one is a Christian or

not? Each one is being told to "do your own thing" as best he can because this is the best he can know anyway.

We Can Know

I shall show you, from the Bible, that you can know the truth. It is not elusive. It is not just whatever one thinks. We can know truth.

Before going to that task, let me explode beyond recovery and repair this philosophy that we cannot know the truth for sure. If we cannot know, then how do we know we cannot know, and why are the philosophers so dogmatic in their contentions that we cannot know? Do they know we cannot know? How do they know it is true that we cannot know what is true? Are they the only ones who can know anything for sure, and all they know for sure is that nobody can know anything for sure? The whole idea is self-contradictory. Let us face reality. What lies behind this whole "cannot know" doctrine is the egotism of the self-appointed superiors of professors who seem to think they have a monopoly on knowledge and wisdom and that they, not God, are really the final judge of all things. And some of our own, who have drunk deeply from the polluted wells of these agnostic and atheistic seminaries, are pouring more and more of this same kind of anti-God rubbish into the minds of young people being sent to these campuses of so-called "Christian schools," where men teach who claim to believe the truth, but who teach this heresy. Why do not those on these campuses call a halt to such things? Where is their faith and honesty? Are teaching jobs, tenure, acceptance, and money that important? But so many that I know, who say they do not believe we cannot know, are as silent as death when it comes to challenging and rebuking their colleagues.

The Bible says we can know the truth, not just guess at it, and not just locate what seems to be the safest. The Scripture has within itself evidence that it is the Word of God. From evidence we can ascertain and know what is true. Faith is a way of knowing from evidence.

Here Are Some Who Knew

Acts 17:11, *"These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so."* Why would they do that except the Scripture tells the truth and they could learn it? Jesus said, *"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think that ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me."* Why would Jesus say that if truth could not be ascertained?

Colossians 4:16, *"And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that ye, likewise, read the epistle from Laodicea."* Why should they do that, since they could not know truth anyway, according to the "wise" men of our time?

Colossians 1:9, *"For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."* Did Paul believe those people could know the truth, and be sure about it? Did he pray for something he knew could never be anyway?

First Thessalonians 5:21, *"Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good."* How could we ever do that if we cannot know what is true for sure? By what would you prove anything with any certainty? How could you ever know what was and was not good, if truth is unattainable?

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."* If there is something called false, there must be something called truth. If you know one, you must be able to know the other. What a futile exercise, trying the spirits, if truth cannot be determined with certainty!

Some Others Who Could Know

Shall we go on some more? Yes, we shall, because the matter is of utmost seriousness. First Timothy 4:3, *"Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth."*

What's that? Somebody knew the truth? It says that. Shall we follow the "wise" men and deny it?

Ephesians 3:4, "*Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.*" We can know even as Paul knew from what he wrote.

Ephesians 5:17, "*Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.*" If some of our seminary trained "scholars" had been alongside Paul they would have been able to correct him when he said we could understand God's will. They could have told Paul that the best anybody can do is to probably find what they feel might possibly be the case. Poor God! If only he had studied at the seminaries and become a college professor He would not have had Paul write such foolishness as the teaching that we can know the truth!

First Timothy 3:15, "*But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*" If people cannot know truth, how could Timothy know how to behave? And just what is the church to support and proclaim if truth cannot be determined for sure? Shall we just teach doubts and maybe-so's?

Jesus said, "*Ye shall know the truth.*" That settles the matter for believers in Christ. If they question that, they question Christ, His Deity, His perfection, His Messiahship, everything about Him. They are agnostics and destroyers of souls. If we cannot know the truth, there is nothing that will set us free from the onslaughts of sin and hell. It is a serious question to ponder!

A description of false teachers, those who lead others into apostasy, in Second Timothy 3:7, is that they are "*ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*" Some are just exactly like that among us today. And false teachers they are!

Proverbs 23:23, "*Buy the truth, and sell it not.*" How can you, when you cannot tell what it is? How can we worship in truth (John 4:24)? On and on we can cite passage after passage that refutes the agnostic and

Satanic inspired heresy that we cannot know truth for sure.

Some Do Not Love the Truth

Are you willing to face reality and accept what Scripture teaches? The reason people say nobody can be sure is because they do not love the truth, do not want the truth, want to be allowed to "do their own thing," want to teach and say whatever they wish without opposition, and wish everybody would go their way. They are so pumped up on their own egotism and theological degrees that they think they are the only ones who know anything, and they know most everything, even as they deny anybody can know anything for sure. Why follow such servants of the devil? Why allow such people in classes, pulpits, in schools and churches? But they are there!

Salvation depends upon a knowledge of and conformity to the truth. Without truth, knowing it, believing it, obeying it, we shall be damned. The Lord did not come to simply make men religious. They were that way before He came. He came to save them from sin through obedience to the truth (First Peter 1:22). If truth cannot be known, then God has commanded the impossible and will damn us for not knowing and doing it. What sort of God do you think God is, anyway? The doctrine that we cannot know the truth, and know it for sure, is blasphemy against God!

Romans 10:17, "*Faith cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*" Faith is not taking a leap into the dark. Faith is based on evidence (Hebrews 11:1). We can believe because of the evidence God has revealed. Just as surely as God said something, it is sure and certain and we can know it is so. When God tells us Jesus was born of a virgin, the ravings of atheists, agnostics, infidels, modern translators, college professors, etc. cannot change it. So it is with everything else God has revealed. Faith, founded on evidence, is a way of knowing!

We walk by faith, but not a blind, naive, gullible, senseless, stupid, illogical, unintellectual belief. We do not determine truth through the physical senses or

emotional reactions at the moment. We walk by the Word of God and the evidence revealed there.

We do not contend that all truth is easily learned and easily attained. Much truth is relatively simple to learn. Sometimes it is more difficult, even as Peter noted (Second Peter 3:16). So much more the reason for persistent and diligent study! But to say we cannot know for sure is as contradictory to the truth of the Bible as sin is from righteousness. Truth can be known, proven, learned, believed and obeyed.

You and I may not know the truth, may not obey it even if we know it, but it exists because God has revealed it. We can know it and obey it. If we do we shall be saved. If we don't, we won't. Now, if what I have written is not true, how could you ever show it was not true if you contend that truth cannot be known?

* * * * *

Six Men Who Believed In Jesus

There is a tremendous significance in the identification of Jesus made by John the Baptist when he called Him the "*Lamb of God*" (John 1:29). This was not so much a reference to His character and manner, although we recognize the gentleness of Jesus just as we recognize His strength and power that is suggested when He is called the "*Lion of Judah*" (Revelation 5:5). John referred to Jesus as God's offering for the sins of mankind, a sin offering. "*For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh.*" (Romans 8:3). Jesus was the sacrificial lamb just as was the lamb that was slain and whose blood was sprinkled on the door posts and lintel by the Israelites immediately prior to their deliverance from the bondage from Egypt (Exodus 12). That lamb was called the

Passover Lamb. Jesus Christ shed His blood at the cross of Calvary for the deliverance of mankind from the bondage of his own sins, indeed, for the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2). Paul called Jesus "*our Passover*" (First Corinthians 5:7). This action of Jesus, as the Son of God, is a basic truth upon which rests the validity of the blessings and spiritual promises of New Testament Christianity.

Our lesson concerns six men who were convinced of this truth regarding Christ. They were convinced because they had investigated the evidence and had accepted the conclusion and responded to the challenge, "*Come and see*" (John 1:46).

John the Baptist

It is obvious that John the Baptist believed in Jesus. "*After me cometh a man which is preferred before me; for he was before me. And I knew him not; but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore, am I come baptizing with water.*" (John 1:30,31). Whereas John once was not acquainted with Jesus, now he identifies him, "*Behold, the Lamb of God*" (John 1:36). John's mission and message in life was to be the herald, the forerunner, the proclaimer of the coming Christ. Such had been prophesied of him, and emphasized at his birth (Malachi 4:5,6; Luke 1:16,17).

Other events had transpired in the life of Jesus before this one that is recorded in John of which we can read in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This record and event occurred after His baptism at the hands of John and the coming of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, plus the verbal confession that He was the Son of God made by the Father Himself (Matthew 3:14-17). All of these things that had already occurred provided divinely given evidence and a sign unto John the Baptist that Jesus was the Christ. "*And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven, like a dove, and it abode upon him, and I knew him not; but that he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.*"

(John 1:32-34). It was on the basis of this evidence that John believed.

Two Others

We shall refer to two other believers together; men who were not always believers but came to accept the affirmations of Christ as being the Son of God and the Savior of mankind. They are John and Andrew. Verse thirty-five refers to these, *"Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold, the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus."* One is named Andrew, and the other, although unnamed, was probably John. The omission of one's own name in events where the writer is included was characteristic of writing of that day, and the Holy Spirit used John and his style to provide these inspired Scriptures.

Both had heard John the Baptist preach. The success of that preaching is evidenced by the fact that hearers were led to follow Christ. They were not wedded to their teacher, but to the One of whom the teacher spoke. Here is the measure of the success of preaching even yet.

Upon hearing the testimony, they believed and walked with Christ. They called Him "Rabbi," which means an exalted teacher and Master. They spent the day with Jesus. Surely, speaking with Him, being taught by Him, their faith was secured. *"Faith cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of the Lord."* (Romans 10:17). When the day was over, they were convinced of these truths concerning the Christ. The Lamb of God and the provision of sacrifice for sinful man was before them.

Peter

The Scriptures relate how one of these two men, Andrew, sought out another for the Lord, our fourth man for this study. His named was Simon, also later named Peter. *"He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus."* (John 1:41,42). Andrew realized a responsibility that we all have and should recognize; namely, to tell our own

kin, and all people of the world, to come to a knowledge of the Messiah.

We are aware of the great power and influence for truth that Peter became. Peter owed much to his brother Andrew because he had "*brought him to Jesus.*" If Andrew did no more than this, he contributed to the conversion of untold numbers of people through the ages through the efforts of his prominent and aggressive brother. To bring another person to the Lord and to be instrumental in the salvation of a precious soul is one of the greatest accomplishments in life. We may be weak and possess but one talent. But if we use that talent to save a soul, what a bountiful blessing it produces! Proverbs 11:30, "*The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise.*"

Philip

The fifth believer was Philip. Found by Christ, he became one of the Lord's apostles. This Philip is to be distinguished from another Philip who preached the gospel to the Ethiopian, who was one of the seven selected to care for widows being neglected, and who later is said to have had daughters who prophesied, living in Caesarea. Not much is said of the Philip of whom we now speak. But he was one who took a lad with a small amount of food to Andrew, who in turn took the lad to Jesus. Jesus used the small portion of food to feed five thousand. He is also the one who took some Gentiles to Christ (John 12:20,21).

The importance of Philip was that he was a living result of what we call personal work. Andrew was quite accomplished in this type of work. Christ is our example in such an effort. Jesus went personally to Philip just as Andrew had gone to Peter. While some may not consider teaching just one person a very sizeable thing, especially in our day when some count success only in terms of numbers, much of the great teaching by Christ was originally delivered to one or two persons, or a few in number. We should not despise the day of small things (Zechariah 4:10). The lesson on the new birth was preached by Jesus to Nicodemus. He taught of Himself as the water of life to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's

well. He sought out Philip. Many want to discharge their duty to teach others only by proxy, by which I mean, paying somebody to do their teaching for them. While it is right to support preachers and teachers, is it not also something we can and ought to do in conversing about Christ and salvation with others? We have the capacity to talk with others about the weather, sports, politics, the affairs of the day and business matters. Is it too much to mention the soul and the need of Christ sometime? Some feel they have done their mission work to tell somebody else about someone who needs the gospel, which is good, but not enough. But then we see Philip in turn finding Nathanael, who is our sixth man who believed in Jesus.

Nathanael

Nathanael seemed to exhibit at first the greatest amount of skepticism concerning Christ. There was great doubt in his mind. We are told why this was the case with him. Even though he is called a good man "*in whom is no guile*" (John 1:47), possibly Nathanael was overly impressed with the sordid reputation of the city of Nazareth from which Jesus had come and which was His boyhood home city. When told by Philip that Jesus was the One of whom the prophet Moses had written, Nathanael questioned, "*Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?*"

The response of Philip to this question of skepticism is noteworthy. There was testimony and evidence available to show that Jesus was the One of whom Moses spoke, as well as the other prophets. But Philip did not attempt to persuade Philip on the basis of what Jesus meant to Philip. Sometimes people try to win souls by giving their "testimony" about what Jesus means to them. We are not instructed to do that. We are told to tell people what Jesus means. But what he means to various ones may differ from person to person, and one could hear all of that and still never know the truth about Jesus Christ. Philip simply wanted Nathanael to "*come and see*" for himself. It is important that each one have a sincere personal faith, not a borrowed faith from someone else. Each person needs to investigate the evidence for himself. It is convincing. The honest and sincere mind,

upon consideration of the evidence, will recognize the truthfulness of the claims concerning Christ. Philip wanted Nathanael to check the information for himself. If only we were able to get people to open their hearts and minds long enough to allow the evidence that produces faith to have a chance! How dreadfully unfortunate that so many will never take a serious look, but reject Christ in ignorance and arrogance without investigation! They thereby reject their only hope of salvation and never give truth the opportunity to bless them. Why will some people refuse to inquire about the most important of all matters, but will exhaust themselves in searching out information about the trivial, mundane, temporary, earthly matters that have no real importance after all?

When Nathanael met Jesus, Jesus made mention of certain facts about Nathanael that nobody could have known except by divine power. *"Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile. Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee."* (John 1:47,48).

Nathanael, now having opportunity to see the evidence of Jesus Christ and His Deity, then said, *"Thou art the Son of God; thou art the king of Israel."* (John 1:49).

Two Significant Points to Consider

There are two primary points that deserve our respect from all of this. One is the identification of Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one, the Lamb of God, the Rabbi and Master, the Son of God, the King of spiritual Israel, the One of whom the prophets spoke. All of these identifications are found in the passages we studied. The identity of Jesus is the foundation of Christianity.

Two, all of those who were brought from the state of unbelief to belief were brought through the consideration of the evidence. With minds and hearts that were open and willing to be taught, they heard, they saw, they hearkened. The message persuaded them. And so it is

today in winning souls for Christ. The weapon is the "*sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God*" (Ephesians 6:17). The gospel is still God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16). When we can encourage people of like mind to examine the claims and proofs concerning Christ, to "*come and see*" for themselves, not rely upon what other men say but what the Holy Spirit has revealed in the all-sufficient Word (Second Timothy 3:16,17), therein is the power of persuasion for them to believe and obey unto salvation.

We might add, there were those who were so interested in the welfare of others that they bustled themselves in getting the evidence presented to other people. We may not, and probably will not, be successful in winning everyone we attempt to win, everyone we want to win, but our task is to be sure that all people everywhere have the exposure to the only way of salvation, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the whole world.

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So You Can Know and Understand My Joy in Producing A BURNING FIRE.

It may be negligence on my part to not include excerpts from letters that encourage me, but I have been humbled by good words that so many of you have sent my way. I am a realist and know that my work is not as wonderful as some of you have expressed. But it sure does me good to hear it. It is but a small paper relative to others.

There are many good publications being produced by faithful brethren. We have many papers that are standing for the faith. I commend to you **Contending for the Faith, Firm Foundation, Spiritual Sword, First Century Christian, Sowing the Seed, Reason and Revelation**, church bulletins, and any number of others not named. I do not imply by not naming some that they are not worthwhile and influential. These come to mind at the moment. I am grateful for every effort faithful brethren are making to teach the truth of God. **A BURNING FIRE** has its limitations and inadequacies. But I do appreciate the encouragement. JB

Good Words Ignored

Baptist Church Manual, page 81, "It may be laid down as a principle of common sense, which commends itself to every candid mind, that *a commission to do a thing authorizes only the doing of the thing specified*. The doing of all other things is virtually forbidden. There is a maxim of law, that *the expression of one thing is the exclusion of another*." It cites Biblical illustrations. " For example: God commanded Noah to make an ark of *gopher-wood*. He assigns no reason why gopher-wood should be used. The command, however, is positive, and it forbids the use of every other kind of wood. Abraham was commanded to offer his son Isaac for a burnt offering. He was virtually forbidden to offer any other member of his family." These are good words. But it makes one wonder why, since God authorizes singing in Christian worship and not playing mechanical instruments, Baptists do it anyway. They should practice what they preach on this maxim. JWB

The Last Word

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

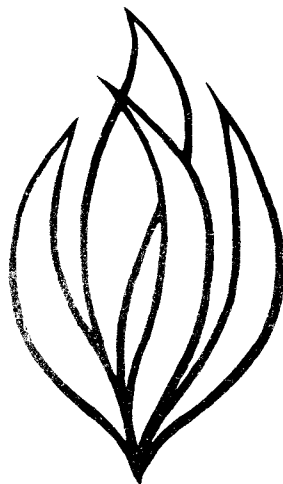
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A Burning Fire



*"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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The Christian and the Races

One of the most vile problems of the first century was that of racial tension. Years earlier God had segregated the descendants of Abraham from the rest of humanity. Exodus 19:5,6, *"Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people; for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel."*

This special relationship was not based on color of skin, superior mentality, wealth, or power. This came out of the covenant God made with Abraham, *"In thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed."* (Genesis 22:18). When the Lord's kingdom was established, which is the church, this wall of partition between Jew and Gentile was abolished. His blessings in the kingdom are open to all (Mark 16:15; Ephesians 2:14-16; Acts 15:9; Revelation 22:17). *"Whosoever will may come,"* is His will now.

The first few years of the church's existence was almost exclusively composed of converted Jews. They were converted to Christ, but problems arose as the gospel was taken to other races. The reason for the problem was racial in nature as well as religious. The Lord taught Peter by a vision that the gospel is for all (Acts 10:9-16). Peter had preached the universality of the offer of salvation in Christ on Pentecost, but obviously the comprehension of this was not clear (Acts 2:39). Upon arrival at the house of Cornelius, Peter indicated a full grasp of this truth when he said, *"Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him."* In divine confirmation of this truth the Holy Spirit was given to the Gentiles and they spoke in tongues. The only conclusion that could be drawn from all of this was, *"Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us who believed on the Lord Jesus*

Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? When they heard these things, they held their peace and glorified God saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."

During the ministry of Paul he constantly encountered certain Judaizing teachers, teachers who contended Gentiles must conform to certain tenets of the Mosaic Law in order to be saved. Even Peter exhibited withdrawal from Gentiles in Antioch until Paul rebuked him (Galatians 2). A full discussion of the matter took place in Jerusalem (Acts 15), and the truth was ascertained. But resolution of the prejudices between races was not experienced by all people, even in the church. Racial problems and the matter of the Christian's relationship to those of another race still abide today as it has through the years.

It is a Worldwide Problem

It is elementary to note that the world is in racial crisis. We have Jew versus non-Jew, black versus white, yellow versus red, etc. The evidence of the problem is more pronounced in some portions of the world than others, depending on the extent of mixture of the races in a given locality. But it is prevalent everywhere race touches race. Those of varying racial, religious, economic, educational, and social backgrounds are feeling the forces of prejudice one against the other. None have escaped it. You are doubtless an object of prejudice as well as a possessor of it. The problem in our nation, the United States, is primarily white versus black, black versus Jew, Jew versus Gentile, as well as other tensions between people whose skin pigments differ.

Man's inhumanity to man has been a blighted part of human history. Exploitation, retaliation, lack of consideration has marred the past. It mars the present. It does not oversimplify to say that such tensions exist because many see fit to ignore, even in one's individual life, the teaching of Christ regarding our attitude and treatment of our fellowman.

Many efforts have been made to eradicate the overt actions of prejudice, hatred, and racial bigotry. We should know by now that intolerance of others, racial hatred, suspicion will not be eliminated by legislation, segregation, integration, court decisions, and other such things. Experience shows that such things have often aggravated a bad situation. They have at times prohibited abuses temporarily. But the real problem is a problem of the heart. The Christian's relationship with those of other races is a heart issue.

Same Creator

The Bible teaches that God is the Creator of all men (Acts 17:26). Christ died for all (First John 2:2). Each soul is precious and will be saved or lost. As far as one's relationship to God is concerned, race is immaterial (Galatians 3:28,29).

Many have mistakenly referred to the Old Testament "curse of Ham" as the basis for assigning certain races, particularly the black race, to the role of inferiority. This reflects grave Biblical ignorance. The curse, Genesis 9:25, was upon Canaan, a son of Ham. Nothing indicates the curse had anything to do with skin color, but servitude. People of every race have been in servitude. Nothing indicates all of Ham's descendants were under the curse anyway. Whatever the curse, under Christ such things have no significance any more than the special relationship the Jew had with God .

There may be, and in some instances there are, social justifications and sociological defenses for racial segregation in some respects. But this does not justify unfair racial discrimination. Segregation is not always evil discrimination, even though it often is. Men of every race usually take pride in their own race, and admit to the soundness of judgment that calls for those of basic similarities to remain among those of their own race. Although Biblically one cannot declare racial intermarriages to be sinful, few seriously question the extraordinary problems created in such relationships. The virtues of wisdom and the need of social, religious, economic, educational, and other likenesses urge similar views regarding marriage within one's own race.

Generally, speaking, people of every race with whom I have discussed the matter agree with that.

Racial differences do not justify one being party to oppression and injustice. No one race has the exclusive problem of racial prejudices. It is evident in every race. But Christians will have no part in that. He does not try to deprive another of rights that belong to all humans. He has no right before God to create strife, riot, lawlessness, or create unrest between races. He is neither a rioter, nor does he beat up on other people.

Such wicked extremes are not characteristic of true Christians. Whatever social changes are needed he seeks to expedite through lawful means, Christian conduct, and the spread of the gospel standard. He recognizes that racial differences do not necessarily mean inferiority or superiority, but he is aware of the differences and tries to harmonize them as successfully as he can in his own life and society generally.

Being Different is not Bigotry

The Christian is not insistent on segregation or integration of the races in every association of life. Nobody of any race has ever contended for that among people I have known. There may be exceptions, but generally everybody limits the degree of association for a number of reasons. Certainly there are differences of various sorts between people of different races and cultures, possibly due to heritage, education, training, other elements of environment and inheritance. Who is so foolish to deny that? But these difference do not detract from the fact that we are all human beings, created in the spiritual image of God, souls to be saved or lost, and such differences make no difference regarding spiritual worth or spiritual fellowship between us when we are in Christ.

In the New Testament both masters and slaves were Christian brothers. Both were as likely to be white as of different skin color. But when they became Christians, their social status did not change, but their attitude and actions one toward the other was as Christ would have it. They were brethren in the Lord, helping one another

serve God so they all could reach heaven. While it is physically and mentally impossible to be what some call "totally color blind," because we can see we are of different skin color, the Christian is "color blind" when it comes to the spiritual realm, and doing unto others as he would have others do unto him.

The Christian's Concern

The Christian is not insistent on segregation or integration of the races in every association of life. Some of the most godly Christians I have known in different races agree on that. A person has the right to resist either being imposed upon him as if God has so decreed. Wisdom and expediency play a major role in determining such things, even in the church. But his concern is consideration, Biblical education, spiritual regeneration, and the removal of spiritual barriers between races. The Christian regards each person individually, not as one of a certain generalized class, race, or preconceived category. His standard of conduct toward others is not governed just by tradition, emotion, social pressures, or any such thing, but by the way the Lord would have people treat each other. There is no hatred in his heart toward others, nor contempt for an individual just because one is of a different race, or because of other distinctions over which a person has no control. While there are some who like to shock others and run with disregard of the feelings of others being either intolerant of other races, or being hypocritically inclusive of others, the Christian allows the quiet, natural order of things to characterize his behavior. He does not fly off into racial tangents just to prove himself before a mixed up society.

Let me cite an example where segregation or integration can be determined by good wisdom and judgment. Whether blacks and white wish to belong to the same congregation may be a matter of expediency. They should never be separated because of racial prejudice. It may be thought best, to reach people of either race, that separate congregations exist. But it is wrong and sinful to exclude anybody from the ranks of God's people on the basis of race. People attend congregations that may be more compatible to their personal circumstances.

There is nothing inherently evil about this of itself. Would you condemn a black family for not attending a church made up mostly of white people when they might prefer to attend a church made up mostly of black people? Would you condemn a white Christian for choosing to worship where there are mostly white members? If such a choice were made because of racial prejudice, that is one matter. But cannot one choose to serve God among those with whom he prefers so long as they are faithful brethren? And should not those of a predominantly white membership love and respect those of a predominantly black membership, and vice versa? The answers to these questions are not hard to determine.

We may summarize by saying that the Christian follows what is called the Golden Rule. "*All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them.*" (Matthew 7:12). It is not Christlike to lump everyone of any race together and label all such people to be this way or that way. There are faithful Christians in all races. There are degenerate and obnoxious people in all races. Derogatory names, insults, broad sweeping generalities that seemingly allow for no individual exceptions are wrong and unfair.

The Christian must keep before him the mission of Christ and continue to serve that cause. Christ came not to relieve all human suffering, change governments, raise or alter all cultural and economic standards, or even primarily to solve all the social inequities that exist in society. He will affect such things only to the extent that mankind will be converted to His truth and live according to His will. He came to save from sin. Other beneficial by-products of this salvation are merely that, by-products. When someone asks, "What are you doing to help solve the racial problems in the world?" the Christian answers, "I am preaching and practicing New Testament Christianity, converting the sinful to Christ."

Oneness

Christians are of one spiritual fold with one Shepherd without regard to racial differences. All are in the one

body of Christ, going to the same heaven, the same way living by the same divine rule. We may worship together at the same place, or we may consider it more expedient to worship in different places, but that separation does not affect our fellowship or brotherly love one for the other any more than it would between two congregations of similar membership. Christians will condemn every form of evil and will truly love its neighbor, which means seeking his neighbor's highest good.

While the world may war, riot, legislate, enforce, exploit, march, bus, loot, burn, curse, restrict, beat, oppress, defame, rebel, or disparage others, seeking revenge and retaliation, promoting unfair exclusions, this will not be the way of those who follow Christ. The racial problems may never be solved in the world, but it is certain that ways most of the world has been going about it do not solve, and often make matters worse. The child of God will respect all men who are respectable, seek peace with all possible, but above all will seek and save the souls of all whether he be of one's same race or not. He will be known for his courtesy and consideration, and will allow the wisdom of God to chart his daily course in this and all other matters of life.

* * * * *

The Authority of the Bible

NUMBER ONE

If ever there was a time when Christians need to say what we believe and why we believe it, this is the day. I say not with a tone of despair, but with justified and genuine concern, and even more as a challenge, that it is strange that among people who have been a part of efforts to restore the faith revealed in the New Testament, that we need some straight talk about Biblical authority, the necessity for it, and its nature.

Denominations have never accepted the Bible as authority as the Bible demands. At best, they have accepted the Bible alongside their creeds, disciplines, manuals, edicts of councils, conferences, prayer books, feelings, human traditions, later day revelations, etc. But it is increasingly apparent that a renewed emphasis for the need of Biblical authority exists among brethren of the churches of Christ. Too many have adopted too much of the denominational attitude and outlook toward religious authority.

Shall We Put It Aside?

What if I should come before you to preach, but I put the Bible aside? What could I say? Would I even have a place to start or a place to go with any lesson worthy of the identification of a gospel sermon? Would there be any authoritative basis for anything I could preach? But this is what the religious world has done and in the place of the Bible there is a drumbeat of worthless theologies, philosophies, human opinions, politics, social reform, and as often as not, propaganda that is anti-Bible even though it is called preaching the Bible, and coming from the mouths of those egotists who profess themselves to be superior in everything.

While many brethren are unwilling to go that far, just yet, there is too much of what I note among brethren that consists of "how to" pep talks, religious fiction, testimonials, and a page from the emotion-stirring "holy rollers." We have been setting the Bible aside, not all at once, but bit by bit. We have acted, in too many instances, like the Bible is a loose-leaf notebook and we are removing pages one by one.

Some have even declared Genesis one through eleven to be a myth, the flood possibly nothing more than a local flood, even distorting the plan of salvation as if it was grace alone. One of the areas where some brethren are guilty of departing from Biblical authority is in the work of the church. Some years ago some arose to deny work that the Bible does not authorize, but now more and more we see churches involved in activities such as recreation, physical exercise classes, entertainment, social events, ball games, gymnasiums, secular

education, until one cannot tell the difference between the Lord's church and the denominations with their perverted attitudes toward the church. Many others have for all practical purposes silenced any teaching regarding dancing, social drinking, immodest dress, smoking, etc. because too many of the members are guilty, and preachers and elders prefer to please the people. False doctrines are taught on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, such as is taught in colleges, promoted in workshops, and in written materials. A few continue to rightly condemn the long-hair on males, but most disregard what the Bible teaches and think it acceptable to present themselves as if they are of the drug, rock-and-roll subculture. Who is not aware of the contentions over the direct operation of the Holy Spirit many have adopted? Yes, bit by bit, even some who claim to be New Testament Christians are tearing out verse after verse, page after page, of the Word of God.

I ask where is the real difference between tearing up the Bible bit by bit, and throwing it away abruptly altogether? In fact, the only difference might be, the former is more deceptive and subtle, but both efforts accomplish the same disastrous results. One is blatant, and easily detected. The other is sly, gradual, and goes without notice unless one is very attentive.

Liberalism/Modernism

The most pressing issue facing those who believe the Bible today is the vicious attack of liberalism and modernism. Even now we are hearing some of our "scholars" in Bible departments talking how the threat of liberalism has passed, and now the area of danger is what these liberal professors call "the reactionary right wing." This is to remove attention from their own sordid digression and departure from the truth. We have to make a choice to either respect the Bible as the Word of God and the all-sufficient authority of it, or launch into a "do your own thing" imitation of the failures of denominationalism. Some are already promoting the latter, even as they deny they are doing it. The very nature of the Bible demands you take it all, or nothing. The Bible is not a religious supermarket where you can take what you want and leave out what you do not want.

Unless we are so proud, egotistical, blind, naive, and digressive, we cannot deny the existence of the digressive attitudes and activities that have invaded the Lord's people in recent decades, primarily through the avenue of the Bible departments of the colleges, the sophisticated and know-it-all professors, the compromising administrations, the ecumenical lectureships, the literature of compromise often promoted for the sake of making money but used in Bible classes, and the continued willingness of those who say they are faithful but who keep using, promoting, and endorsing the very people who are leading the church away from the Bible. Toleration of this liberal trend will sweep away much of the Lord's church, if not in our day (and we believe in our day), surely in the generation that follows, because it is designed and intended to "up date, make relevant, change, revise, alter, restructure" the church for modern times.

God's Word

All we know and believe is on the basis of evidence, and that evidence is in Scripture. God has spoken and revealed His will. The Bible is that revelation. When any person gets to the point that "*thus saith the Lord*" is not the standard, and when he thinks there is no necessity for Biblical authority, then nothing is left. When any people become more concerned with reactions, what denominational people may think, how popular and prosperous something may be, then the way of apostasy is already paved and greased. Too many today, in a cowardly and sinister pretense of piety, prefer "peace" at the sacrifice of truth. Many times, and we have seen it, what ought to be the first and dominant consideration in matters pertaining to the church and the truth is neglected altogether in favor of assuring acceptance and favor among certain ones, often among the "big names," the wealthy, socially elite, and worldly minded, numbers-conscious promoters. Time and again, instead of seeking Biblical authority for what is said or done, we hear the statement, "I don't see anything wrong with this or that." Just because somebody may not see any harm in something does not mean that God's authority is supporting it. Our question should be, "What does the

Bible teach?" When we respect the Bible as divine authority, this is what we will be asking.

There are commandments from God that rest entirely upon His authority for which we may not see the reason behind it. It may not be something that appeases our senses of ethics or morality. But it is commanded of us, and because of the sovereignty of God we are accountable to obey. When God speaks, man is to hear and heed. We must have the attitude of Samuel when he said, "*Speak Lord, for thy servant heareth.*" (First Samuel 3:9). We cannot know what God desires unless we hear His Word. When we are not following His directions we are going the wrong way. Man's ways are never superior to His.

He is Authority

Jesus said, "*All authority is given unto me in heaven and in earth.*" (Matthew 28:18). He not only possesses all authority, He is authority. What He taught is that which the Holy Spirit reminded the Lord's apostles (John 14, 15, 16). What they taught was the will of the Lord. What they taught is now embodied in the all-sufficient, authoritative, inerrant, verbally inspired, infallible Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17).

We want to turn our attention to the nature of the authority of the Bible, which will occupy the rest of this lesson and the second part as well. We approach our study in full realization that the acceptance of the Scriptures is to accept Christ, and to reject the Scriptures is to reject Christ. The authority of Christ is the Bible.

Supreme

His authority is SUPREME authority. Ephesians 1:20-23, where Paul was writing of what God had done, "*Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him*

that filleth all in all." Again, Colossians 1:18, "And he is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence." Our Lord is this authority because He is Deity, and as Deity in the flesh He lived a sinless life. "For we have a high priest that cannot be touched with feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." (Hebrews 4:15). "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." (First Peter 1:22). His authority is the religious "supreme court." One can appeal no higher. There is no other.

There was a time for Israel when the law that God gave through Moses was the authority. But that law has served its purpose, been fulfilled, and taken out of the way (Matthew 5:17,18; Galatians 3:23-25; Colossians 2:14). No man can set aside God's law except Deity. The Lord Jesus accomplished what that law was designed to introduce. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." (John 1:17).

Jesus said, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." (John 4:34). "I can of mine own self do nothing; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me." (John 5:30).

There is no council, pope, conference, convention, lectureship, preacher, editor, so-called scholar, school Bible department, perverted Bible, civil government, eldership, social organization, fraternal order, or any such thing that can alter, surpass, overshadow, revise, or in any way change the authority of Jesus Christ.

Sufficient

His authority is SUFFICIENT. It is not partial nor incomplete. None can say, "Here is something we can do in service to God for which we need no divine authority." One of the reasons there have been so many innovation, digressions, and introductions of false ideas into "Christianity" is because some have thought the authority of Christ was lacking in some way and they have supplied what they think the Lord overlooked. How many times have men engaged in something for which

there was no Biblical authority and then cried, "Where does the Bible forbid it?"

That is not the right question. When we do what we do "in the name of" Christ, as we are taught to do (Colossians 3:17), we must ask, "Where does the Bible authorize it?" Doing something on the basis that the Bible does not specifically forbid it is to assert the insufficiency of the authority of Christ. On this mistaken notion many brethren have gone into the playground church business, secular education, entertainment, use of mechanical instruments, and any else somebody might want. There is not anything in service to God for which we do not need His authority. Peter said that God has "*given all things that pertain to life and godliness.*" (Second Peter 1:3). I wish all of my brethren believed that. The denominational world never has believed it.

Universal

His authority is UNIVERSAL. His gospel is to be preached to every creature in all the world (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19). The faith of Christ is not a family religion as was the Patriarchal system. Nor is it a national religion as was Judaism. Regardless of where people may dwell, those of every nation that fear Him and do His will are acceptable (Acts 10:34,35). What some of our own people need to learn is that the gospel that saves the poor, saves the rich. The gospel that saves the young, saves the old. This concept of making the gospel relevant to the ghetto, or adapting it to the nuclear scientists, or making it fit the singles group, or this divorced group, or this youth group, or this senior citizens group is to miss one of the important characteristics of the authority of Christ. The truth is just as binding on this generation as the past generation, or the next generation. "*The word of the Lord endureth forever.*" (First Peter 1:25). There is no gospel for the north, and a gospel for the south. There is no truth while at home and something different away from home on vacation. There is not one truth for one nation and another truth for a different nation. What the Lord teaches me, He teaches you. Some of our "learned" brethren need to learn that basic fundamental.

While there are passages directed toward women, some toward men, some toward the young, toward parents, preachers, elders, sinners, saints, His authority, His truth, His saving plan does not vary from place to place. It is universal in scope. We shall continue this thinking in the second part.

* * * * *

The Authority of The Bible

NUMBER TWO

Each of us has the choice to either accept the Bible as the authority in religion, or ignore it and follow whatever we choose. But we must bear the consequences of our choice. While the Bible is discarded by many, it remains the verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, all-sufficient, and authoritative Word of God. Therefore, in all matters pertaining to our service to God we must ask, "What does the Bible teach?" We must respect the authority of God as given in His Word.

In our first lesson we learned that the nature of this authority is that it is SUPREME, ALL-SUFFICIENT, and UNIVERSAL in application to all people, everywhere, in every generation. We today lived under the authority of Jesus Christ, God's Son, and His authority shall continue until He comes again.

Same for All

There is UNITY involved in His authority. By this we mean that the same authority is behind everything He ever said or did. There is as much authority behind one command as another. To be sure, there are some things that the Bible teaches that are more crucial than others as far as the immediate consequences are concerned. But disobedience to the will of God, as it applies to us, is

sinful, and it is just as sinful to disobey one command as it is to disobey another. No man, or group of men, have the right to declare anything that God has revealed, directed, commanded, and instructed to be non-essential and unimportant. Man only shows his arrogance and depravity in pride when he attempts to stand in judgment of God's commands and rank them according to importance as to which ought to be obeyed and which can be ignored.

James 2: 10,11, *"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, ye if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law."* James is not saying that a murderer is also an adulterer. He is saying that when either evil deed is done, the law of God is violated and the guilty stands condemned. This is because the authority that forbids one, forbids both.

Many religious people bemoan the decrease of disrespect for the moral teaching of the Lord. They will try to persuade others to do, or not to do, certain things because the Bible so teaches. But what they do not realize is how they have already undermined respect for the Bible by contending that some of God's commands are important, but others can be ignored. There is just as much authority behind the command to be baptized as there is behind the prohibition of adultery. There is the same authority behind repentance as there is not to steal. The teaching on the Lord's Supper is from the same source as the command not to murder. When you have taught and believed, as most of the religious world does, that you do not have to obey God in baptism, repentance, and the Lord's Supper, you can hardly expect people to regard the moral teaching of the Bible to carry much weight. But the same God, same Christ, same Holy Spirit is behind the entire teaching of the Bible. People who respect Deity will respect what Deity has taught, and will cease their "pick and choose" type of religion.

Learn from False Teachers?

I get very aggravated to hear some of my brethren talk about how much we can learn from the denominations.

One of the reasons the church is suffering from digression and apostasy today is because too many have learned too much from the denominations already, and not enough from the Bible. Some have imitated their methods until they now imitate their message. We need to understand that the same methods that might promote error are not necessarily what is successful or acceptable in promoting truth. Some have learned so much from denominations that whenever false doctrines are taught, then exposed, we hear the wail, "That's just your interpretation." That is the denominational dodge of truth that some of my brethren have adopted in recent years. We could set anything aside that we do not want on that basis. One may interpret and another misinterpret. To interpret means to get the meaning God has given. God has not given a confused and divided message. He is not the author of confusion. When two people interpret the Bible they will be together and united. When they are divided it is because one, possibly both, misinterpret. Why should brethren want to follow the denominations when denominations are constantly dodging the truth with one sort of dodge after another?

The Real Problem

Our problem is not so much the problem of interpretation anyway. It is the problem of the will to abide by what God has taught. We ought to be like Daniel when he was commanded to eat certain foods that he could not lawfully eat as a Jew. He knew the law of God. That was not the problem. The question before him was whether he would obey the law of God or not. That is all that he had to decide. This is the way of most of us in the church. We know the truth, but how many prefer to "learn from the denominations" and think somehow they can get around God's Word? But the authority of Christ abides through it all, one part as well as all parts.

Timeless

The authority of the Bible is TIMELESS. Christ said He would be with His disciples always (Matthew 28:20). His authority did not end when He ascended into heaven. We shall be judged by His Word (John 12:48). We hear people talk about the need to update, modernize, streamline the

Christian faith so it will be relevant and applicable to today's man. Some denounce the faith of Christ as useful only to the first century. They say the world has now become more mature and needs something more mature, and they clamor for change. If the world has become more mature, then we would be better served to return to infancy again. What people really want is a religion that lets them do their own thing without restriction.

The doctrine of Christ is just what all people need, now and forever. The trouble is that too few are willing to listen and learn. Even some of my twisted brethren have suggested that we are answering questions nobody is asking. We are answering questions that everybody ought to be asking. We shall not change the answers to fit the questions. Men need to change their questions if the truth appears irrelevant to them. What the Lord taught in AD 33 is applicable now and shall it be until He returns. The gospel that saved our parents will save our grandchildren. The gospel does not change according to the whims, trends, fancies, and drifts of men.

People need to learn that running from the truth does not change it. Rebellion against it does not alter it in the least. Substitutions and disobedience does not invalidate one thing. Do you know why so many of the so-called modern speech translations are finding such a market today? It is not because they are superior translations. It is not because they teach truth, or are more easily understood. It is because the "truth" is changed in instance after instance to accommodate what men already believe, or what some modernist or doctor of denominationalism wants the Bible to say. Men have rewritten the Bible to suit themselves and pawned it off as the Scriptures. Some of my own brethren have no more respect for the truth of God than to uphold such things as reliable Bibles. We do not need another Bible. We need to learn and follow the Bible we have. We have no objection to updated translations, provided they are translations. But we are offended and stand opposed to these products of merchandise called Bibles that distort and pervert the Scriptures. The Word of the Lord endures and will do so forever, but not because some of my "scholarly" brethren help it to be that way. They have joined the Devil's service to present a new book, with a

different message, that, when followed, will produce a different people than the people God wants. The Biblical authority is timeless and we should respect it as that.

Final

Biblical authority is FINAL. In light of the previously mentioned characteristics, one would expect this characteristic also. When an authority is supreme, all-sufficient, universal, essential in all of its parts, and timeless, how else could it be anything except final? The Bible revelation settles all questions and all matters. There is nothing higher to which anyone can appeal. This is God's final and complete Word.

As absurd and amazing as it sounds, we have been in the presence of brethren who have declared, "Scholarship is the final test." Rubbish! Human "scholarship" has battered against the Bible through the years as much as any other source of enmity the Scriptures have faced. Paul warned against the philosophers and pseudo-scientists. He warned against following human wisdom. The "wise men" of our time care little to nothing for the revealed truth of God. If we want to know the truth, then we must be as the noble Bereans who Paul commend for searching the Scriptures to see what was so (Acts 17:11). The "scholarly" theologian is one of the last sources in which anybody ought place their confidence in matters religious. Away with the doctrine that we follow the "best minds in the brotherhood," "men of stature" as some pitiable brethren describe them. First, often those called the best minds are nothing but educated egotists who think they know better than God. Second, usually those who contend to follow the "best minds" are those who consider themselves among the "best minds." Third, "men of stature" among whom? Some are so impressed with what they consider superior academic "scholarship," the kinds of "doctors" that don't do anybody any good. Usually they are the seminary trained professors who are in the foreground leading the church into apostasy. We have seen some of these brethren with the "best minds" go so far from respect for God's truth that we have no confidence in them whatsoever. Some no longer even believe in the existence of God.

We cannot emphasize too much the importance of knowledge of the Bible and respect for what it teaches as the divine authority in matters governing the relationship between God and man. Regardless of what one does with it, or what you say about, or what I think about it, the Bible remains exactly what God said it is. Someday, we all shall be brought to that realization anyway. Happy will be that person who has shown His love for the truth and followed the Bible. Woe be to those who had set it aside in any way, whatever their reason!

* * * * *

Six Witnesses

"When Jesus came to the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples saying, Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" (Matthew 16:13). "While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying, What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he? They say unto him, The son of David." (Matthew 22:41,42).

These two questions serve as the texts of our study concerning the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth. Was Jesus who He claimed to be? If so, what are the implications for us? What evidence is presented to us that we might believe it? It is very evident from the Scriptures that God expects us to believe that Jesus is the Christ, His only begotten Son, the Savior of man, the long looked for Messiah. But God does not expect us to believe with a blind faith, but has provided us evidence and testimony whereby we can know His true identity.

Paul wrote, *"In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established."* (Second Corinthians 13:1). Jesus taught the necessity of having two or more witnesses in establishing the truth when settling disputes between brethren (Matthew 18:16). The old law taught, *"One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth; at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three*

witnesses, shall the matter be established." (Deuteronomy 19:15). Therefore, for testimony to be considered competent and reliable there is to be a plurality of witnesses. Then testimony is deserving of acceptance.

The basic truth of the Bible is that Jesus is the Son of God. Everything about New Testament Christianity depends on this being the truth. Otherwise, there is no validity, authority, or divinity regarding it. Jesus stated following Peter's confession of Him as the Son of God, "*Upon this rock I will build my church.*" (Matthew 16:18).

Witnessing

Sometimes today we hear people say they are "witnessing for Christ." We should "*speak as the oracles of God*" (First Peter 4:11), rather than take Biblical phrases but convey false ideas by them. A witness in the Bible was one who either was an eye witness or one who was inspired of God and could testify reliably. Simply telling what others have testified is not "witnessing for Christ." Nobody today qualifies as a "witness for Christ" since nobody today is an eye witness of the things written, nor are they inspired of God as were New Testament witnesses. We have heard denominational people claim to be as inspired as were the apostles, but they claim what is not true. Today we can relate what witnesses witnessed, but we are not witnesses. We should not use such terminology lest somebody think we are claiming inspiration, which would be a false claim.

He Cited Six

In John five Jesus cited six witnesses of Himself; six sources of evidence to show that He is the Son of God and the Savior of mankind. It is our present intent to consider these six witnesses.

Jesus has just healed a lame man at the pool of Bethesda. He had taught the unity and oneness of Himself and the Father, and how He came to do the will of the Father. He cited how authority belonged unto Him, that the judgment would be executed by Him, and that there was no way for men to honor the Father without honoring the Son. This is a very exclusive claim of

Christ. He taught the coming resurrection of both the good and the evil, and how eternal life was through Him. All of this teaching was founded on the claim of His Deity, that He is the Son of God.

Such teaching caused some to accuse Him of blasphemy. They were offended at Him and sought to slay Him. But Jesus provided sufficient evidence to sustain His claim.

His Own Word

The first witness was His own testimony. *"I can of mine own self do nothing; as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true."* (John 5:30,31). Jesus claimed to have come from God. He had claimed His Deity in John 4:25,26 when He spoke to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. *"The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am he."* Later He said, *"For if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."* (John 8:24). It had been prophesied (Isaiah 55:4) that Jesus would bear witness. *"Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people."*

He said His witness was not true, not because what He said was false, but because He was but one witness and that testimony alone was not the plurality of witnesses that was needed. Nonetheless, His testimony cannot be set aside, for even though He is but one, He is one.

John the Baptist

Then He said, *"There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth."* (John 5:32,33). John the Baptist was sent by the Lord for this very purpose. *"And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest; for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways."* Luke 1:76). *"As it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the*

way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” (Mark 1:2,3). “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.” (John 1:6-9).

When Jesus came to John, John said of Him, *“Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”* (John 1:29). Jesus made it clear in His discussion with the Pharisees that John spoke and acted with authority (Matthew 21:25). The work and words of John the Baptist must be received with the highest credibility and validity. He was the second witness Jesus mentioned.

His Works

But there was even a greater witness than John that proved Jesus to be the Son of God. *“But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.”* (John 5:36). What Jesus had done, was doing, and would do show Him to be who He claimed to be. Nicodemus had recognized Him as one from God because of the miracles that He did (John 3:2). Those with whom the apostles had contact considered Him one of the prophets of old because of His works and words. His miracles, His sermons, the way He fulfilled the prophecies of old, the authority by which He taught, all proclaimed the same message, *“This is the Christ, the Son of God.”* No servant of the devil could or would do the good things He did, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, calming the elements, casting out demons, forgiving sins, etc.

When John the Baptist was in prison and soon to die, he sent some of his people to ask Jesus, *“Art thou he that should come? Or look we for another? Notice the evidence given. “And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. The Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard, how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached.”* Luke 7:20-22). All of this,

plus the climatic evidence of His resurrection, declared Him to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4).

The Father

Furthermore, the Father Himself had borne witness of Him. *"And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me."* (John 5:37). At His baptism (Matthew 3:17), and on the mount where He was transfigured (Matthew 17:5), the Father had said, *"This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."* A different kind of testimony was given as recorded in John 12:28 to glorify Christ. This testimony had been given in the presence of others, such as Peter, James, John, Moses, Elijah. Peter later wrote, *"For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount."* (Second Peter 1:16-18).

Already more than a sufficient number of witnesses has been produced. But there was additional testimony to be considered.

The Scriptures

Jesus cites the Scriptures as bearing record of Him. *"Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me."* (John 5:39). Jesus established early in His work the precedent of proving truth by Scripture. He blunted the temptations of Satan by answering each temptation with, *"It is written..."* and then quoted teaching from God as found in the book of Deuteronomy. Never has there been any question as to the respect Jesus had for the Scriptures. We would that all today had similar respect. There is no more reliable testimony than the verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative, and all-sufficient Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17; Second Peter 1:20,21). To question the Scriptures is to reflect a doubt of God. By the promises, prophesies, the old law, the

Judaistic system, all of which served as a shadow of things to come (Hebrews 10:1), one can almost piece in detail the work and mission of Christ as He fulfilled God's plan for the salvation of mankind.

Jesus said the Scriptures gave them eternal life. Why is that so? It is because the Scriptures tell of Christ. There is no separation of Christ and salvation, or salvation from Scripture. The reason the gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16) is because the gospel reveals Christ, the author of salvation (Hebrews 5:9).

Moses

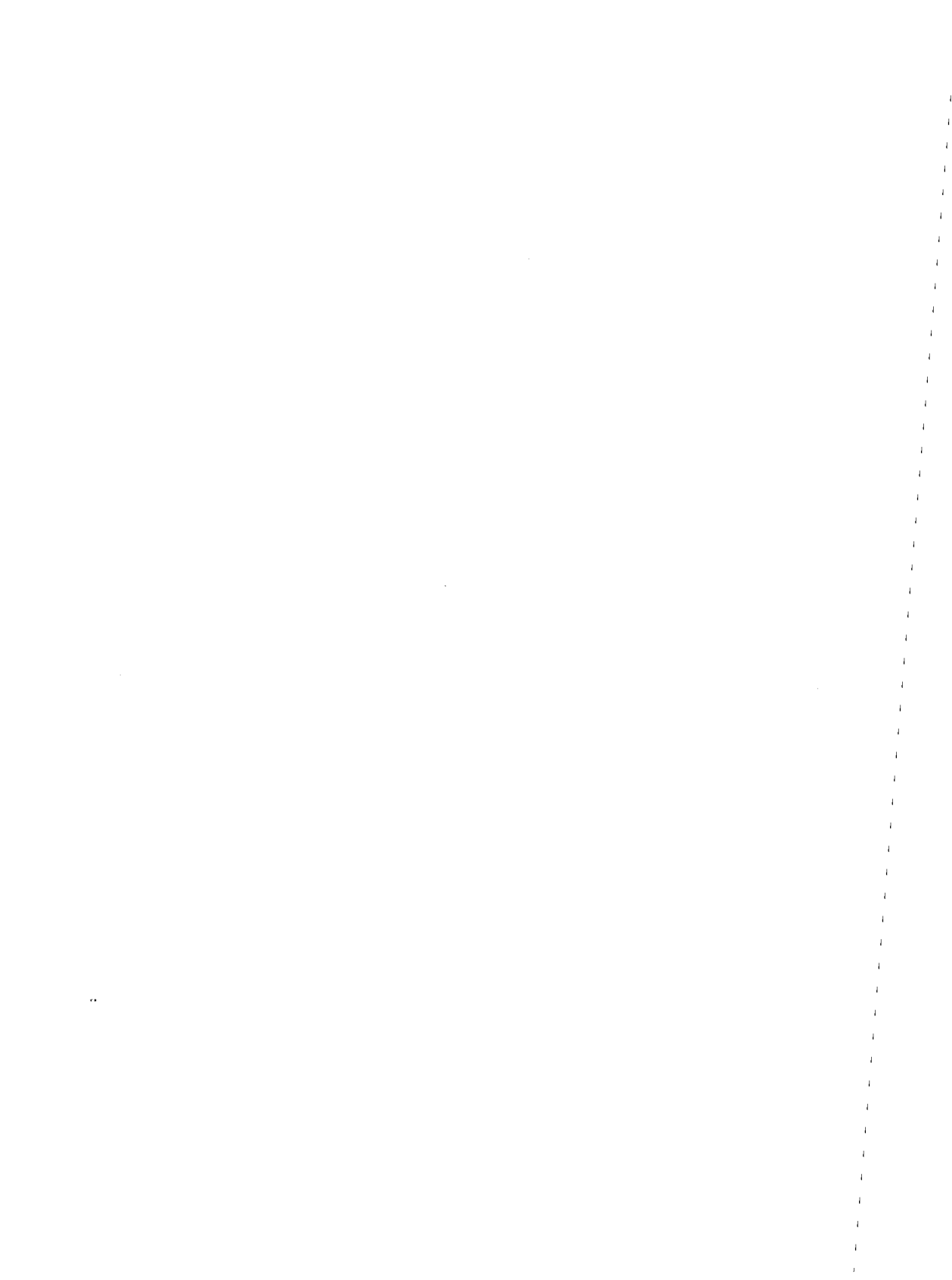
Closely connected to the fifth witness, is the sixth, which is Moses. *"For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?"* (John 5:46,47).

None of the ancient patriarchs were more respected by the Jews than Moses, the great deliverer, law giver, guide, prophet, and writer of inspired Scripture. Jesus taught that understanding the place of Moses in God's great scheme of redemption would lead one to accept Him because Moses testified of Christ. He wrote of Him and foretold concerning Him. It is grossly inconsistent to claim to believe Moses and reject Christ.

Jesus presented six irrefutable witnesses, any one of which we can accept at full validity. By them we can know for a certainty that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior of mankind.

We look with disdain and rejection on any man, book, so-called "scholar," perverted "Bible," modernist, clergyman, whoever and whatever that in any way demeans, minimizes, or removes the God-given evidence of the Deity of Christ. Because He is the Son of God we have the obligation to know Him, believe in Him, obey Him, follow Him, being subject unto Him in everything. So we close by asking, *"What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?"* Our answer will determine our eternity.

* * * * *



Deserving of Honor

I had the honor recently of speaking to the teachers of a nearby congregation at a most delightful event. It was their annual appreciation dinner for their teachers. There were around fifty to sixty people present, and we enjoyed a wonderful meal together, and I thoroughly benefited from being in their midst. What impressed me was the genuine expressions by the elders of that church for those who labored faithfully in the Word. There is a lot of good work being done by brothers and sisters who assume the awesome task of a teacher. I say it is awesome because of the responsibility that goes with the job (James 3:1). Probably few teachers ever receive the kind of respect they really deserve. And certainly those who teach cannot know of the magnitude of spiritual blessing they are to those who are their students. Lives are changed, minds and hearts are molded, God is glorified, souls are saved because of the noble and sacrificial work of being a Bible teacher. JWB

The Last Word

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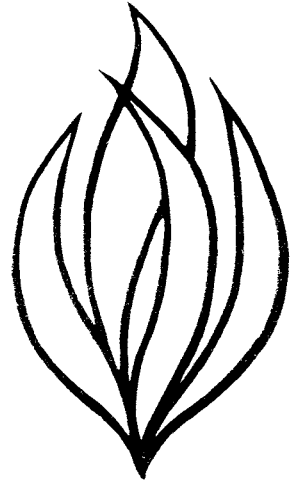
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A Burning Fire



*"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).*



THIS ISSUE

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Contending for the Faith

You should begin this lesson by reading Jude from your own Bible, then return to our comments. It is one short chapter, but your understanding of it is vital to this discussion. It would be profitable to discuss the entire chapter verse by verse. But our focus centers on verse three, *"...and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints."* Here we have a description of THE FAITH. Literally the text tells us *"to contend earnestly for the once-for-all-delivered-to-the-saints faith."* While writing this epistle on salvation, the Holy Spirit led Jude to include these words about contending for THE FAITH. There are reasons for this. There will always be those who will contend against it. The text, chapter one, shows us God's recognition of false teachers, false brethren, false doctrines, and the dangers of such to the souls of men everywhere, even the church of Christ. God knows what will happen to the church when error is left unchecked and exponents of error are allowed to go without challenge to their false doctrines.

False Teachers

False teachers are described in several ways in this one chapter book. There are those who crept in (verse 4), religious creeps. They are ungodly men (verse 4), filthy dreamers, fleshly, despising God's authority (verse 8). Jude calls them brute beasts (verse 10). They are like Cain, going to have their own way; like Balaam, the Old Testament compromiser who led Israel to sin; like Korah, leader of rebellion against Moses, Aaron, and the authority of God (verse 11). They are spots, clouds without water, trees with dead fruit (verse 12). Verse thirteen pictures them as raging waves foaming in shame, and wandering stars in the blackness of darkness. They are murmurers, complainers, and mockers (verse 18). God's attitude toward such people is clear. Verse five says they shall be destroyed as

unbelievers. Everlasting chains under darkness are reserved for them (verse 6). Like Sodom and Gomorrah, they will suffer the vengeance of eternal fire (verse 7).

Knowing the danger of such people, having a love for brethren, Jude was compelled to write with diligence to deal with false brethren, and deal with them he does. There is no hesitation or apology in his words about false teaching and false teachers. He wrote with clarity, definiteness, and decisiveness. There is nothing vague or ambiguous in his words. Notice verse three in detail.

The Faith

There is such a thing as THE FAITH. Paul said in Ephesians 4:4, "*There is one faith.*" How that differs with denominationalism that contends not for THE FAITH but for many faiths, leaving it to man to choose the faith of his choice! THE FAITH is the plain, simple, powerful New Testament gospel revelation, the truth, the doctrine of Christ, the Word of God. When Paul was in Paphos and met Sergius Paulus he encountered Elymas, the sorcerer who sought to "*turn the deputy away from the faith.*" (Acts 13:8). The deputy was a prudent man. Elymas resisted the teaching of Paul and tried to prevent the acceptance of the system of salvation, that body of doctrine of God's plan for saving man.

In Acts 14:22, Paul exhorted brethren to "*continue in the faith.*" From Acts 15:9 we learn the hearts of the Gentiles, like all others, are purified by the faith. The Greek includes the indefinite article "the." Galatians 3:23, "*But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterward be revealed.*" The faith refers to the gospel system. This is not just belief, but has reference to the religion of which Christ is author and founder. Paul continued to write what we are, namely, children of God. He tells us where we are, namely, in Christ. He tells us how we got there, namely, being baptized into Christ. This is the message of THE FAITH, God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16) for which we are to earnestly contend (Jude 3).

A Delivered Faith

Notice further that the faith is a DELIVERED FAITH. It is not a product of the minds of men, man's genius, invention, or origin. Paul states, Galatians 1:1 that his apostleship was of God. In verses 11,12, "*But I certify you brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ*" What he preached was not a product of his education, former religion, own reasoning, human philosophy, or any such thing. The gospel is affirmed to be heaven's revelation.

Let us compare two passages, both of which reveal the origin of the gospel. First Corinthians 2:9-13, "*But as it is written, Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit. For the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God., For what man knoweth the things of man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*" The other verses are Ephesians 3:1-5, "*For this cause I Paul the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given unto me to youward, how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.*"

Both passages tell us of God. What did God do? He made a revelation. What was revealed? All things of God; the mystery of Christ. By whom was this revelation made? By the holy apostles and prophets. By what means is this revelation given? By words, written and spoken, which the Spirit teacheth, not words originating with men. Here is the source of THE FAITH. We are not dealing with human opinion and experiences. These are not testimonials induced through emotionalism and imagination, but the once-for-all-delivered-faith from God to inspired men through the Holy Spirit. Every word of it is God-breathed. 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, throughly furnished unto all good works." Scriptures teach a verbal, plenary, all-sufficient, infallible, inerrant, authoritative revelation of THE FAITH that is embodied in Scripture as it was given to inspired men.

Once For All

Notice further that the faith was ONCE FOR ALL delivered. The word translated "once" is used of what is of perpetual validity and never in need of repetition. This asserts the timelessness of the Word. This same word "once" is used in Hebrews 9:26,28 regarding the death of Christ. Christ does not have to die a second time. It was all-sufficient the first time. This teaching sinks forever the contention that there is latter day revelation from God. The gospel is the same now as it was in the first century, and will remain the same unto the Lord returns. It is the same in every generation, in every nation, making no allowance for additions, subtractions, modern-day visions, cultures, dreams, special leadings, etc. THE FAITH is a faith adequate for all time and all people.

A Delivered Faith

THE FAITH was DELIVERED to the saints, God's people. They are the custodians of THE FAITH. First it was revealed to inspired men, earthen vessels (Second Corinthians 4:7), and now recorded in the inspired book (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Christians are not given the power to make, alter, change, update, or any such thing regarding the Word of God. Christians are the stewards of THE FAITH. As a banker has the responsibility to care for, guard, defend, and properly use that which is placed in his care, so the saints have a similar duty toward the Word. As the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God (Romans 3:2), Christians are entrusted with THE FAITH. Our greatest responsibility and privilege is to love this truth, live it, defend it, preach it, contend for it, and if need be, die for it. If we do not have

the strength, concern, courage, will, and conviction to deal with THE FAITH that way, there is none who will.

Contend For It

The exhortation in Jude is to **CONTEND** earnestly for THE FAITH. This is an obligation and privilege. The word translated “earnestly” comes from a word meaning to agonize, struggle with difficulty against all dangers and antagonists to the gospel. The word is sometimes translated “strive” (Colossians 1:29; First Timothy 4:10; Luke 13:24), and “fight” in First Timothy 6:12, “*Fight the good fight of faith.*” It is a term of combat and warfare.

Just how does one earnestly contend for the faith? Jude was doing that very thing in this epistle. Recognizing error, false teachers, false doctrines, he was waging war against them. He knew they were not to be ignored and they would not just go away. He had the right, indeed, the duty, to warn brethren about such things until brethren showed an awareness of them. While some ignored the matter, insulted the proclaimers of truth, impugned motives, he still was plain, pointed, powerful, precise in his presentation on matters regarding sin and religious error. He contended for the faith in the very letter in which he urged others to contend.

Paul Contended

Paul was contending for the faith when he treated Elymas the way he did. Notice his straightforward and powerful words, “*Then Saul, (who was also is called Paul), filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, and said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?*” (Acts 13:9,10). In Galatians two, where Paul recounts his exposure of error in Peter when Peter showed himself inconsistent and compromising, and Paul rebuked him to the face, before them all, because Peter was to be blamed. Paul was contending for the faith. When he commanded the withdrawal from those who walked disorderly (Romans 16:17; Second Thessalonians 3:6; First Corinthians 5:7), he was contending for the faith. When he specified by name those who needed marking, such as Hymaneus,

Alexander, and Philetus (Second Timothy 4:14), and Demas (Second Timothy 4:10), he was contending for the faith. When John, the apostle of love, named Diotrophes as the disturber that he was (Third John 9), John, like Paul, was contending for the faith. Faithful gospel preachers who do the same today are lovers of truth, and do not cringe to contend for the faith.

Peter and Others Contended

When Peter preached the gospel on Pentecost, when Paul stood before the Jewish councils and Roman courts, when uproars were created in various places, the apostles were contending for the faith. When John warned not to believe every spirit, but try them (First John 4:1), when Peter warned of false teachers that would bring in damnable heresies and cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of (Second Peter 2:1,2), when Paul urged Timothy that some would depart from the faith, and he was to preach the word in spite of what people said, did, or thought (First Timothy 4:1; Second Timothy 4:1-4), they were contending for the faith.

May I add a further comment to the words of Paul to Timothy. Second Timothy was the last letter the apostles penned. He realized that apostasy was threatening the church. Still he urged, "*Preach the word.*" When? "*In season; out of season,*" which means, when people like it, and when they do not; when they want it, and when they reject it. By reproof, rebuke, and exhortation, with longsuffering and doctrine, he was to contend for the faith. Why? Because the time was coming when even brethren would not want it; when brethren prefer what they wanted to what God said they needed.

Paul contended for the faith when he warned the Ephesians elders for three years with tears about apostasy coming into the church through them. He taught that elders ought convict the gainsayers (Titus 1:9), not coddle up to them and run along with them. Stephen was contending for the faith when he fearlessly preached the truth before the very leaders who had caused Christ to be put on the cross. Plainly he told them the truth, even when they hated it. They considered

him their enemy because he dared tell them the truth. He gave his life (Acts 7) contending for the faith.

Jesus Contended

Jesus set the example in contending for the faith. Those who perceive Jesus as some kind of effeminate, weak, namby-pamby pacifist, a wishy-washy religionist, just do not know the Lord as Scripture reveals Him. He was no shabby revolutionist either. John called Him the Lamb of God (John 1:29) when speaking of Him as the sacrifice for sins. But John also wrote that He was the Lion of Judah when writing of His character (Revelation 5:5). When He confronted error, His zeal ate Him up. He acted decisively. None could doubt where He stood and none could mistake why He stood as He did. When attacks were made on Him personally, He paid little attention to it. *"When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously."* (First Peter 2:23). But then the message of truth that He preached was opposed, you find no stronger actions among men than those taken by our Lord. Christlikeness in contending for the faith is sorely needed in the ranks of God's people in our own day. Too many, who claim to be kind and loving, are just cowards and will not contend for the faith.

In contending for the faith, we must uphold every portion of it. We must oppose anything, everything, anybody, everybody, anywhere, everywhere, any time, every time, that efforts are made to minimize or contradict THE FAITH. Especially is this true when the fiery darts of the evil one come crashing against the church from the outside, and the insidious digression bubbles within the church. We are soldiers of Christ and He is the captain of our faith. We are to go forward in this spiritual warfare to liberate souls from the enslavement of sin, and defend the glorious freedom from sin that is in Christ. Some are spectators and not participators in this fight. Instead of being God's gladiators, some are Satan's agitators, undermining like traitors. Faithful men of God must *"contend earnestly for the once-for-all-delivered-to-the- saints faith."*

* * * * *

Responsibility to the Eldership

There are matters that require straight-forward language and our subject is one of them. The Lord's church was established and organized by Christ. It is revealed to us in the New Testament. Christ is head over all things to the church (Colossians 1:18). It is organized into local congregations that are overseen by elders, served by deacons, taught by preachers and teachers, and every member a part of the body. This is the Biblical pattern.

Those who serve in the work as elders and deacons are men who are to have certain qualifications as outlined in First Timothy three and Titus one. Elders have certain duties before God and the congregation. Various terms are used to designate their work, such as elder, pastor, shepherd, presbyter, overseer, and bishop.

Paul stated to the elders of the church of Ephesus, *"Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore, watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."* (Acts 20:28-31).

Their Task

Their work is to feed the church the spiritual food, exercise oversight or superintendence and direction of affairs, guard the church from error, whether it comes from within, without, or even from among themselves, and to see to it that God's will is done, taught, and respected rather than defiled, perverted, and ignored.

Hebrews 13:7,17, *"Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation."* *"Obey them that have the rule over you and*

submit yourselves for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you." Ruling, watching, being examples, leading are parts of the work.

First Thessalonians 5:12, "*And we beseech you brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you...*" Those who are over others in the Lord are the overseers or elders. Their labor includes service to the church, admonishing and teaching the things that must be proclaimed.

First Peter 5:1-3, "*The elders which are among you, I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the suffering of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed. Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind, neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.*" This repeats what has been said plus the prohibition of being "lords" and acting like bosses. Elders are not dictators nor tyrants. They neither make nor break God's revealed will, but are to uphold truth, defend truth, not legislate truth nor compromise it.

Their Authority

Elderships do have authority to rule, to carry out their God-given function. If they did not have authority, then the very purposes mentioned in the above texts could not be expedited by them. There is no more awesome responsibility on human beings than on elders. They shall give account for everyone in their charge (Hebrews 13:17). Paul calls it a "*good work.*" (First Timothy 3:1).

Members Have a Duty

The congregation led by elders also has responsibilities to those who lead them. Elders are to be held with honor (First Timothy 5:17,18); even double honor, including moral, spiritual, and material support, when they perform their duties well.

First Thessalonians 5:12,13 calls for knowledge of them, which means more than simply knowing who they are

and calling their names. It means to grant to them the respect due because of the work they discharge. The verses also teach us to esteem them highly in love. This love is not some weak and mushy sentimentality or a personal affection. We are to love every brother or sister. But God expects members of the church to help, not hinder, the eldership in its work. This is done by consideration, kindness, respect, aid, and assistance.

First Timothy 5:19 teaches us not to receive accusations against an elder except it be by two or three witnesses. Those who lead are subject to criticism. They are not infallible in their work and lives. They are still human beings and prone to mistakes, individually and collectively, just like others. Sometimes some act as if an elder is to be absolutely sinlessly perfect and have infallible judgment, every time on everything, or he becomes a target. God's plan that calls for a plurality of elders over each congregation helps to prevent mistakes. When errors are proven, First Timothy 5:20 applies. *"Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others may also fear."* But the Bible teaches it is wrong to receive, accept accusation and criticisms of elders without proper proof. To open a barrage against an elder, openly, publicly, or privately, when there is no support or justification for it, is to sin. Some are very long and loud in talking about and against some elders, but will not talk to and with the elders.

Hebrews 13:7,17, already quoted, teaches us to be mindful of them, considerate, which means literally to have a feeling for. It calls for attentiveness, giving heed, paying attention and conforming. We have a duty to follow their faith, imitate their good lives, obey their decision, submit to their rules. The writer is saying we are not to cause them grief while they do their work, but be a source of joy to them. This does not mean to follow them or any other into doing wrong and sinning against God. The idea is not difficult to understand.

Follow Their Lead

Suffice it to say that leaders cannot lead if followers will not follow. It is strange how some in a congregation will ask a man to serve as an elder and then give him the

hardest time he can in his work. The relationship of elders to the members is that of leaders and followers, brethren together. Since God expects elders to lead, does He not also expect members to follow? Elders are to feed. Members are to partake of the food offered. Elders are to rule. Members are to submit to that rule. When elders are discharging their duty as the Bible teaches them, they have the right to expect the congregation to feel obligated to hold up their hands and give them support and assistance. There are instances when elderships act arbitrarily and even sinfully. Nobody is required to follow such leadership. When they go astray on some matter, we have the duty to point this out to them rather than create rebellion against them.

It is a sinful deed to be a rebel against those who properly rule. We emphasize properly. We sin to defy those we are to obey if they are doing their duties. Those who serve as elders are brethren in the Lord. They should receive the courtesy every brother is to give to every other brother, and even more, because of the special tasks they are expected to perform.

Abuse of Power

Some elders take advantage of their place and act like they are drivers of their personal slaves. We have known men in elderships who have yet to learn the first principles of being considerate toward the congregation, who have the "I am boss" attitude toward their work. But the failure of some misplaced men who by misfortune have been appointed over a congregation does not excuse members from their duties. Very rarely is the case when there is not something deserving in an eldership.

We urge elders to be attentive to their work and discharge it with great efficiency. We also urge members of the church to be aware of the responsibilities we all have toward elderships. God's plan works better than anything man can devise when it is practiced.

* * * * *

The Glorious Resurrection

The Bible refers to several resurrections, physically and literally, figuratively and spiritually. In the Old Testament we read of some who were literally and physically raised from physical death by God's prophets. Similarly were some raised in the New Testament by Christ and the apostles.

A resurrection is mentioned figuratively in Revelation twenty with reference to the rising again of the cause of Christ for which some had been martyred. The conversion of the Jews, if it would occur, was characterized by Paul to be like a resurrection (Romans 11:15).

When one leaves the ways of sin and is forgiven by the Lord this conversion is called a resurrection from spiritual death life (Romans 6:3,4; Ephesians 2:1).

The resurrection at the end of time when Jesus returns will be a literal, bodily resurrection. *"Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth, they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."* (John 5:28,29). *"Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."* (John 11:23,24). First Thessalonians 4:13-18 makes clear the final and great resurrection will include all the redeemed, living and dead.

Our topic is the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ following His crucifixion. *"He is not here; for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay."* (Matthew 28:6). *"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he arose again the third day according to the scriptures."* (First Corinthians 15:3,4).

What It Proved

The resurrection of Christ from the dead proved Him to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4). This was not the first or last evidence given of this fact concerning Him. But if Jesus had died, and remained in the tomb, He could not have sustained His claim of being the Messiah. Why is this so important to Christianity? It is because His Deity is the foundation upon which all of the religion of Christ rests. On this rests His authority, His credentials, and the salvation He offers. If He was not who He claimed to be, He is a pretender, liar, deceiver, and fraud. Who could place confidence in such a one as that? How could such a one ever save anyone from anything? Our very expectation of heaven is based on this truth. *"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, and believing have life in his name."* (John 20:30,31). *"For if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."* (John 8:24). His Sonship is the foundation of the church (Matthew 16:18). *"For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."* (First Corinthians 3:11). This is the reason modernists and liberals are so insistent and vicious in their attacks against the Deity of Christ. They resent every evidence that affirms He is God's Son. They will deny the record, change the record, lie about the record, distort the record, do anything to remove evidence that He is who He is. This is why they deny miracles, because His resurrection is a miracle and they cannot afford to allow the resurrection because that proves His identity and authority.

A Fulfillment

The resurrection was in fulfillment of divinely-given prophecy. Prophecy made and fulfilled shows the hand of God behind it (Deuteronomy 18:22). A major characteristic of the preaching of the apostles was the use of prophetic Scriptures to show how Jesus fulfilled them. Peter did this on Pentecost when he referred to the prophecies of David (Acts 2: 25-28,31). *"He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption."*

Had Jesus not come from the tomb He would have proved Himself to be a false prophet. *"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up...But he spake of the temple of his body."* (John 2:19,21). *"When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them, and they believed the scriptures, and the word which Jesus had said."* (John 2:22). *"He is not here, but is risen, remember how he spake unto you, when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and third day rise again."* (Luke 24:6,7). These were prophecies He himself made concerning Himself.

God's Power

The resurrection is a demonstration of divine power (Romans 1:4). Man has no such power in himself. There have been times when God worked through men, but the power was always of God. God is the giver of life (Genesis 2:7), and the best man can do is to temporarily prolong life. The resurrection was a miracle, a direct intervention by Deity, supernatural and beyond human ability. While it is not our theme in this lesson, let me suggest that a study of the evidences of this resurrection is heavily one-sided in its favor. Since this miracle is proved true by the evidence, why is there reason to deny or question any other miracles recorded in the Bible? Once one has accepted the fourth word of the Bible, "God," he has no problem with anything else revealed therein. To deny the resurrection is to deny God's Word and God's power.

God's Wisdom

The resurrection, in God's wisdom, was an essential ingredient in His plan for redeeming sinful man. Just as the Lord's death was a part of that plan, so is His resurrection. We are saved by the gospel (Romans 1:16; First Corinthians 15:2). Part of the gospel is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (First Corinthians 15:3,4). Without the resurrection the plan is incomplete.

We are delivered from sin by being obedient to the form of doctrine that Paul preached (Romans 6:16-18). The doctrine is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

The form, or representation, of that doctrine is baptism into Christ (Romans 6:3,4). We die to sin, are buried in water, and are raised to walk in newness of life. We are planted in the likeness of His death and raised in the likeness of His resurrection (Romans 6:5). God's plan for redeeming man includes and depends upon the resurrection of Christ. Baptism saves, but because of the resurrection of Christ (First Peter 3:21). Had He died and stayed dead, wherein could we have hope in Him?

Reason for Hope

The resurrection does provide hope for the faithful Christian. Just as in His death He paid the penalty for our sins, in His resurrection He gives the basis for eternal life. *"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"* (John 11:25,26). How could a dead man ever make such a offer?

After Paul had listed several dire consequences if Christ had not been raised, such as their preaching being vain, faith vain, the apostles being false witnesses, being yet in sin, those who had died had perished, and we are most miserable (First Corinthians 15:14-19), Paul said, *"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."* (First Corinthians 15:20-22). All those dreadful consequences do not abide. Rather, the glorious promises and good things made possible by His resurrection are ours. Peter tells us God *"hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."* (First Peter 1:3).

We can come to the resurrected Lord, be saved from eternal spiritual death, and inherit eternal spiritual life, by obeying and living for the resurrection Christ. Can we not see why it is so appropriate to refer to His resurrection as a glorious resurrection.

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The Faith of Hebrews Eleven

There are several major themes in Hebrews. We learn of the supremacy of Christ over man, angels, Moses, everything. We read of warnings, remedies, and preventions of apostasy. There is also the call to faith, especially in the eleventh chapter. This chapter has been properly titled, "The Hall of Faith," because it contains the names of people of great faith in times past. Those people looked beyond what they could see with the physical eye, and even beyond their own experiences. Having the Word of God, they were confident of unseen things as much, probably more, than that which was seen. The evidence God had provided convinced them of unseen realities.

It is foolish to dismiss the unseen simply because it is unseen. We do not actually see life, spirit, love, thought, but we see irrefutable evidences of their existence.

Defined

Faith is defined in Hebrews 1:1, "*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*" Faith is not a "shot in the dark." Nor is it a "leap into the unknown." God has never asked man to believe anything without sufficient evidence whereby he can be sure of what he believes. Faith is rational and intelligent, provoking confidence and assurance. We can know by faith because faith is based upon divinely-given testimony. "*Faith cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*" (Romans 10:17). Faith begins and ends with the limits of this testimony. Faith makes the unseen certain because God has declared it so, and given assurance of it. It is vital to our spiritual welfare that we understand Biblical faith.

What Faith Does

Faith saves. Romans 5:1, "*Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" The faith that saves is an active faith that cause

us to do as we ought. It has the unique quality of demanding action. We wish to consider some of these qualities and actions of saving faith as is demonstrated in Hebrews eleven.

Saving faith provokes worship and sacrifice. The church is to offer spiritual sacrifices (First Peter 2:5). Among them is the sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15). Abel offered sacrifice to God *"by faith"* (Hebrews 11:4). God had obviously instructed what was to be done because to act *"by faith"* requires the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

Worship has always been expected from man by the Lord. Even now, as Jesus taught, *"God is a spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."* (John 4:24). Matthew 4:10, *"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."*

Some want to worship their own way and this explains why there are so many different rituals, ceremonies, new ideas and fads in worship. How to worship has not been left to man to determine. Worship infers respect and honor toward God. We cannot worship acceptably if we show no respect for what God has said regarding how we are to worship. We are to worship by singing, praying, observing the Lord's Supper, giving of our means, and studying His Word. This is that which is revealed in the New Testament as the practice of the early Christians as they were guided by inspired men.

While we realize how wrong it is to worship God according to our own will, is it not just as rebellious to refuse to be present at those times when God is to be worshipped according to His will?

Walking by Faith

Saving faith provides the way in which we are to walk in life. Ephesians 4:1, *"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called."* Second Corinthians 5:7, *"For we walk by faith, not by sight."* Romans 4:12, *"And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had yet*

uncircumcised." First John 1:7, *"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."* Genesis 5:24, *"And Enoch walked with God; and he was not; for God took him."* Hebrews 11:5, *"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had testimony that he pleased God."*

To walk by faith is not to live blindly, guessing, merely hoping and wishing you are going the right direction. It means to walk or live with confidence because you are going in harmony with the will of the Lord. It is nonsense to claim a saving faith, but live life our own way, like the sinful world, separated from God, contradictory to His way. It should be obvious that we cannot walk by faith without a knowledge of the faith. Ignorance of the will of God is at the foundation of the waywardness of the way of life so many pursue.

Faith and Works

Saving faith means works of obedience. There is no conflict between faith and works of obedience. One without the other amounts to nothing. James 2:17, 18, 20, 22, 24, *"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. 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... But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?...Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?...Ye see then how that by works a man is justified and not by faith only."*

We are not saved by works of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9), or our own works of righteousness (Titus 3:3-5). Nor can we be saved by works of the Mosaic Law (Romans 3:20). But saving faith necessarily demands obedience. Genesis 6:22, *"Thus did Noah according to all that God commanded him, so did he."* Hebrews 11:7, *"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house..."* Noah's obedient faith saved his own family and condemned the wicked world that rejected that faith. The faith that saves is the faith

that obeys. In every example of faith in Hebrews eleven the people acted obediently upon the testimony received.

Saving faith is life giving. Genesis 15:6, *"And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it unto him for righteousness."* This was said of Abraham. Man cannot be saved by his own righteousness (Titus 3:3-5). Eternal life is dependent upon the righteousness of God. We are either saved God's way or not at all. The benefits of His righteousness are appropriated by an active and obedient faith (Romans 5:2). Abraham's faith led him to obey (Hebrews 11:3). He looked for a city (Hebrews 11:10). He offered Isaac as sacrifice (Hebrews 11:17). This is evidence of a perfected faith that assured him of a life with God.

Faith in Making Decisions

Saving faith provokes the making of right decisions. Moses often was faced with momentous decisions, even early in life. Reared in Pharaoh's court, educated in the ways of the Egyptians, realizing that he was an Israelite and Israel was God's nation, he had to make a decision where he would take his stand. Hebrews 11:24-27, *"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasure of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible."* By worldly standards Moses made a foolish choice in forsaking power, wealth, prestige, pleasure, and possibly the throne of Egypt. But he chose hardship, suffering, trials, afflictions, being reproached even as was Christ. He did this in order to do God's will, and be with God's people. By faith he chose the way of life, God's way. Going God's way is seldom the easiest way, but it is the best and right way. It is the only way that provides genuine happiness both now and in the hereafter.

Faith's Power

The power of faith is seen in other matters mentioned in Hebrews eleven. Israel was delivered from Egypt, the

walls of Jericho fell, Gideon with few men routed Midian, Barak, Deborah, Samson, Jephthah, and many others did mighty things for God because of a strong faith. Their faith did not allow them to wait and see the end of things. Regardless of how things turned out, they followed God's will. They knew what God said and they had confidence in God, respecting the evidence God gave them. They *"kept the faith,"* come what may!

What of my faith and your faith? Is it like those of Hebrews eleven? Let us not deceive ourselves. If our faith is not like their faith, how can we be saved? Faith is one avenue of knowing. Based on divine testimony, we can be sure and confident of the truth. We do not live life with a maybe-so regarding right and wrong. Faith leave no room for doubt. Away with the false notion that if we accept something by faith that there is room for doubt. To so teach is to promote agnosticism. We can be as sure of truth as we can be sure the Bible is the Word of God. What Scripture reveals is not just the most likely, the most probable, the best of alternatives. The Bible is His inerrant and infallible Word and we can rely upon it.

We are saved by faith and without it we cannot be saved. Our faith must lead us to obey, worship, sacrifice, live each day God's way, making the right decisions and doing all this with confidence.

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Things Worthwhile

You have heard the old adage, "All that glitters is not gold." That means that everything that appears desirable is not desirable. Often what seems to be of value is actually striving after the wind. Many things are deceptive, counterfeit, and are more of a waste of time and talent than something that contributes to our welfare and benefit. We have to constantly keep on guard lest we be overtaken by people and things that offer what may seem to be fantastic claims and promises, but fail to produce things worthwhile.

What really matters? What is really worthwhile? Jeremiah tells us, "*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). Solomon wrote a similar theme, "*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*" (Proverbs 14:12).

Having the Right Standard

Mankind has accumulated many facts, developed many things, but in spite of his genius in certain realms, and his accomplishments, he is not qualified to establish the standard by which real value is determined. Man left to himself becomes more and more degraded, not uplifted. A person never proves himself more foolish than to try to live life by his own wisdom separated from the One who made him and knows what is best for him. God knows! What God says is right! Anything that varies from the will of God for man is harmful to man and is wrong. The Bible so teaches and experience so proves. It is true that many do not accept the standards of God, but that does not disprove the validity, credibility, infallibility, and benefits of God's standards for man. It ought to be reassuring to us that in spite of the trail of failure that mankind has left behind him in "doing his own thing," we can know of the reality and existence of things that are really worthwhile, and we can know that we can find out what they are and have them for ourselves.

Having a Savior

It is worthwhile to have a loving and caring Savior from sin. Even if we denied it, it would not change the fact that "*all have sinned*" (Romans 3:23). It is sin that separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1,2), and the wages of sin, the ultimate payment, is spiritual death (Romans 6:23). Man is doomed and damned in his sins and he does not have the capacity to save himself by himself. But God has provided mankind a Savior which is Christ the Lord (First Timothy 1:15). He came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). How dark and dreary the reality of this world would be if there was no salvation from sin. Mankind's greatest need is salvation from sin. How we

wish the world would come to that realization! What a benefit for all that would be!

Having Peace

It is worthwhile to be at peace with God. More than the riches, power, fame, and fortune that this world can give, and even that comes to a relative few in this world of turbulence and disturbance, there is a real peace "*which passeth all understanding*" (Philippians 4:7).

This peace is "*in Christ*." Romans 5:1, "*Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*." Jesus said, "*These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world*." (John 16:33).

So many are disturbed and distraught all around us. They have sought peace from the wrong sources. They have used indulgence and satisfaction of the passions, drugs, escapism, turning to the psychologists who wrestle with disturbed minds hoping they might produce the cure. But so long as we live in sin and refuse God, we war against the very thing we say we want. Only by being faithful in Christ can we have the inner peace that the Almighty has provided. Reconciliation with God through the forgiveness of our sins is the pathway of peace. "*For he is our peace...*" (Ephesians 2:14).

Having Hope

It is worthwhile to live life with the hope of an eternal life in heaven with God and all the redeemed. We know life is brief and of uncertain length, but certain to end. What a cruel hoax, how useless and meaningless, if life ended in the grave! What would you give in exchange for the hope that you have, Christian friend? The faithful are promised eternal life (John 3:16; Titus 1:2; First Peter 1:3-5).

The great "*one hope*" of the followers of Christ is heaven. But we do not speak of mere existence. All shall exist in eternity. Even the wicked shall be raised (John 5:28,29). In spite of the false doctrines taught by some sects that

the evil will cease to exist at death, the Bible teaches all shall be raised, good and evil. The Christian's hope is that beautiful place called heaven.

This hope is found in the same relationship with God as the peace of which we formerly spoke. *"And this is the record, that God hath given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son."* (First John 5:11).

Regardless of whatever else we might attain during our span of years on earth, whatever else we may possess or enjoy, we cannot and will not live even this life to its fullest and best without hope for the life that follows hereafter. This hope is the anchor of the soul (Hebrews 6:19). It is the comforting power in times of distress. It is the motivating power in times of discouragement and weakness. It provides an unshakeable joy within the heart that circumstances and happenings will not destroy if we walk in the footsteps of Him who leads us.

When Death Comes and Eternity Begins

Next, consider two other worthwhile things together. They have to do with the termination of this life, and the life after physical death. James wrote, *"Go to now, ye that say, Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain. Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, if the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that."* (James 4:15-15). Death means separation (James 2:26; Ecclesiastes 12:7). All experience death, either as we have observed the death of others who have preceded us, or, if we be alive when He returns, we shall be changed and separation occurs (First Corinthians 15:51,52).

At death, regardless of friend, family, brethren, or foes, we shall bid them "good-bye." Then, as Israel crossed Jordan, we shall enter the chilling waters of death and we leave behind all that we have known in our earthly existence. Shall we attempt that crossing, which cannot be avoided, alone? We shall not be alone if we have taken advantage of God's offer to *"walk through the valley of the shadow of death"* with us (Psalm 23:4). The

Lord Jesus knows what it is to die. He will take those that are His into the safe-keeping of our heavenly Father. Those who walk with Christ in this life will be blessed to have Christ walk with them through death.

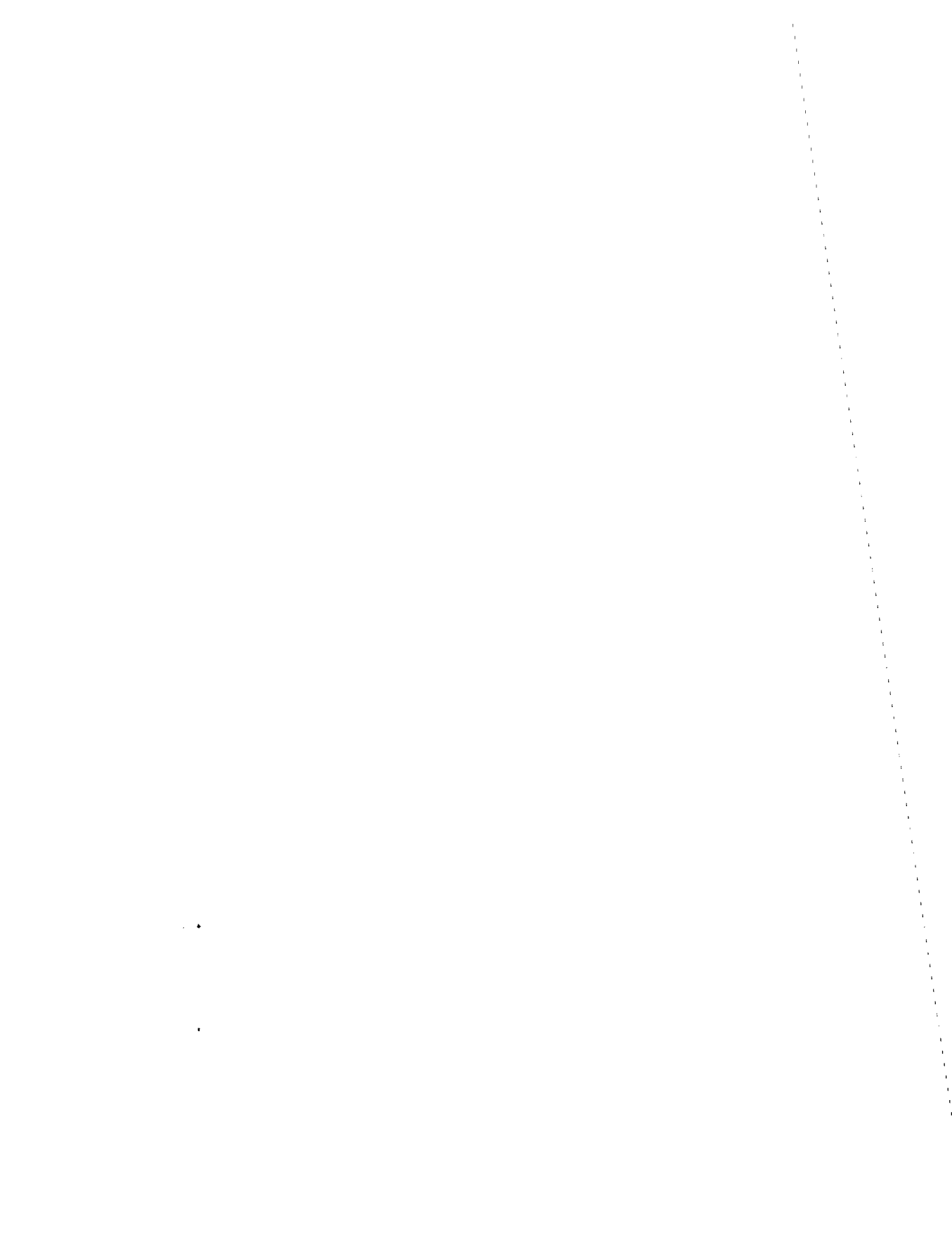
One who witnessed the death of Voltaire, an outspoken atheist, said, "God spare me from witnessing the death of another unbeliever." Is it not worthwhile to have the assurance that the Son of God will lead you step by step through the uncharted waters and you will have no fear, but anticipation of the Lord's "*Well done?*" Jesus conquered death, and through Him, we will also know that victory of being "*more than conquerors.*"

In God's plan, at the time He considers appropriate, the Lord Jesus shall return. His words, "*I will come again,*" cannot be stifled even beneath the scoffing and mockery of skeptics and unbelievers. At His coming this earth and all that is therein shall be burned up (First Peter 3:10-12). It will be the day of judgment and the separation of the righteous from the unrighteous forever (Matthew 25). Then what will really matter? Then what will we say is truly worthwhile?

Then shall the Christian be given his reward in heaven (Matthew 5:12). We shall receive the crown of life (Revelation 2:10). We shall enter into that eternal existence of bliss. Paul wrote, "*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 to all them also that love his appearing.*" (Second Timothy 4:6-8). All the gold, silver, fame, fortune, frolics, pleasures that characterize this world which passeth away will be gone forever. The redeemed in Christ will possess for eternity everything that is really worthwhile.

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***You will benefit from thinking on the thought
suggested on the back cover.***



Can Homosexuals Be Saved?

There is much talk about this sin in our society. And it is sin. There is no way to deny the Biblical condemnation of homosexuality except to be dishonest. Some have come down so hard that you would think they did not want homosexuals to be saved. Others are so twisted in their thinking that they don't even think it is wrong. But I wonder why this question?

Why do people ask this about homosexuals? Why not ask the same question about some other group of sinners and see what answer you get? Can a thief be saved? Can an adulterer be saved? We know they can, but not in their sin. They must repent of it, come out from it, be cleansed by the blood of Christ. So it is with a homosexual. One cannot keep on practicing sin. The way of salvation for the homosexual is exactly the same as for all other sinners. One big problem that exists today regarding this sin is the way that prominent government officials and other degenerate liberals are trying to make this sin acceptable. It is a sin and always will be . JWB

The Last Word

* * * * *

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

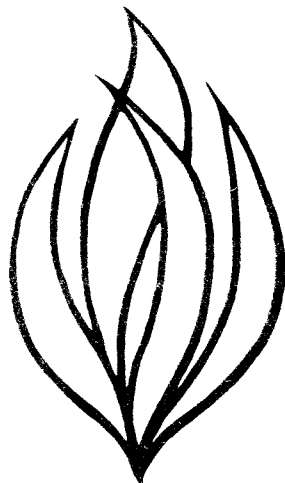
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A Burning Fire



*"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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The Treasure and the Pearl

Matthew 13:44-46, "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls, who when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it."

A parable has been defined as an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is a story involving physical things that teaches spiritual meanings. In Matthew thirteen there are seven parables, each depicting, defining, explaining, and illustrating something about the kingdom of heaven. Because of similarity, it is reasonable to study some of the parables together.

Our two parables under consideration, the parable of the treasure and the parable of the pearl, do not merely repeat the same identical lesson. The primary message is repeated, but with a difference. These two parables complement each other. Together they include two broad classes of people who are so fortunate as to come into possession of the kingdom of heaven.

The Kingdom

What is the kingdom of heaven? It is the same as the kingdom of God, God's kingdom, His spiritual kingdom, that which has come from God, the kingdom that had its origin in heaven, the Lord's church, the kingdom of Christ. This kingdom was prophesied to come in the Old Testament prophecies. It is the one of which Christ gave Peter, then all of the apostles, keys that they used in preaching the gospel of the kingdom. It is the kingdom of heaven in the sense that it was designed in heaven, and those who live faithfully therein shall exist with God in heaven for eternity. The kingdom of heaven is composed of a citizenry that is the same as the church (Colossians 1:13). There are few truths that are denied so fiercely in the denominational world as this truth, but

there are few matters that are emphasized more completely in the Scriptures than the identity of the church as the Lord's kingdom. These parables teach the glory, worth, value, greatness, and desirability of being in the kingdom, the Lord's church.

Finders and Seekers

The difference in the parables is the difference between "finders" and "seekers." Sometimes men would bury their treasure. There were no banks and possibly none to whom they would entrust their wealth. Sometimes men died with the secret of the location of their treasure dying with them. There it would remain until someone possibly discovered it through chance. "Found", according Thayer, means to find by chance, like stumbling upon it, unaware of its existence until it was located. The picture is like one plowing in a field and his plow uncovers a box of treasure that he had not anticipated nor even knew existed.

The pearl merchant is somewhat different from that. He did not just "happen" upon the goodly pearl. He perceived that it did exist somewhere, and he was diligently seeking it. He had some pearls but they were blemished, tinged in some way, with defects of some kind. He spent effort to locate the pearl of great price.

There are two kinds of people represented here who come into possession of that which is valuable. One was a "finder" and the other was a "seeker."

The discovery of their prize is not what made the treasure or pearl valuable. The value was there whether they ever discovered them or not. Regardless of what reaction they might have taken once they knew the treasure and pearl existed, the value was inherent in the treasure and pearl. We must stress the value. Their good fortune was twofold: (1) discovering what was already of great value, (2) recognizing the value of what they discovered and having sufficient appreciation for it to make the effort to own it.

The Value to Them

How valuable was the treasure and pearl to them? Something may be of great value, but not to a particular person. Some may not care for what they have and consider something very valuable as almost worthless. But these discoverers sold all they had to secure for themselves what they wanted. No price was too dear to obtain what they considered valuable and available.

What is Pictured?

Such is the earthly story. Let us learn the spiritual meaning and application. The treasure and the pearl represent the kingdom of heaven, the church. Just how valuable is the church? The value of a thing is determined by the price paid for it. However men may consider the church, the Lord considered it of such value as to pay the price of the blood of Christ for it (Acts 20:28). How valuable is the church to you? Some seem to consider it so useless. What a tragic mistake for anyone to so consider the church of Christ. Christ gave Himself for it (Ephesians 5:25). How valuable is Christ?

There is quite a contrast in God's sense of values and those held by the denominational world regarding the church. How can men say the church is not essential since Jesus died for it? How can men consider the church optional in light of its relationship to God and Christ? Some do not think it is worth working for its welfare. Some who are members of it are not loyal and faithful. But just as Christ is the Savior, the church is the saved, and is the very embodiment of God's plan for saving man. Christ will save the church (Ephesians 5:23). There is no salvation outside the church than there is outside of Christ because the church is His body.

Some go through life oblivious as to how meaningful, beautiful, valuable it is living with God in His kingdom. But by chance they hear the truth, learn it, having never realized the existence of such blessings in this life. They never knew how much they needed Christ, or the joy of being in Christ. But they happened upon the truth.

There are others who have realized that life has purpose, a meaning, that there must be truth in the world, and have searched diligently for it before discovering it.

The way of the Lord for man is valuable whether men ever discover it or not, or whether they respect it once they become aware of it or not. How wonderful it is for all concerned when people do show appreciation for what God offers once they are aware of its existence.

Why the Church is Valuable

The church is of great value, not because of the righteousness of the people in it. They have been washed clean of sin by the blood of Christ, and now live in a relationship where the blood of Christ keeps on cleansing as one walks faithfully (First John 1:7). All the credit for the value of the church belongs to Christ.

Just as the treasure and pearl was so dear to those in the parables, so much so that they gave their all to obtain them, so it is with the Lord's church. One must deny self, and follow Christ. Those who love sin must turn from sin. The lover of money must abandon his covetousness. The indolent man must learn to work. The violator of the law must learn to obey the law. The lover of pleasure must control himself and follow after righteousness. In other words, in order to make the gain, there must first be the sacrifice. It is wonderful to realize that we never have to give up anything that is worthwhile or good for us in order to lay hold on the spiritual wealth of being in the Lord's church. We must be like Paul and count all things but loss for the cause of Christ.

Two Points

These two short parables make two great points that directly bear upon our duty and accountability before God. They teach us the value of the church. They also teach us what the Lord expects of each of us regarding the church. Do we respect what Jesus taught? If so, we shall be in the church, laying hold on the valuable treasure and pearl of great price, the spiritual wealth the Lord has made available to us in His church.

* * * * *

What I Owe the Local Church

Let us first point out some matters with which we surely would agree. Surely, every Christian desires to do what is right in the sight of God. He wants to properly discharge his duties in whatever realm he is involved.

The New Testament speaks of the Lord's church in three ways: (1) the church everywhere, the universal church; (2) the local church, local congregation, and (3) the people of God assembled for worship. The Lord wants us to be concerned about the church in whatever sense we use the term. Our lesson centers on the local church.

In Acts 9:26-28, Paul, after obeying the gospel and being added to the church as obedient believers are (Acts 2:47), came to the city of Jerusalem and wanted to be identified with brethren in that locality. He wanted their fellowship, their association, to give and receive the strength, comfort, and encouragement that comes to members of the local church together.

"And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem."

Universally

We have a duty to the church everywhere because it is the body of Christ. But we especially have a duty to the local congregation to which we belong. It is in the local church that we serve. The church universal has no governmental structure other than Christ as the head of the church. Each congregation is independent of the other, self-governing within the teaching of the Bible. Where a local church has members that have a keen

sense of local responsibility you will have a happy, growing, active, strong church of Christ. We want to bring a few of these duties to our attention.

Locally

We all want the local church to radiate a godly influence. Therefore, every member has the duty to live a godly and righteous life. *"Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."* (Titus 2:12). We are to be as a city set on a hill, the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). When we fail in this we do injury to the cause of Christ and to every other brother and sister in the Lord. It is not just our own business what we say, do, or think. When it concerns others, as influence always does, we owe it to others to be what we profess to be; followers and imitators of Christ. What hurts one member hurts the entire body.

Some Desires and Duties

We want the home church to stand for the truth. This is what the church is assigned to do; namely, to be the pillar and ground of the truth (First Timothy 3:15). This demands knowledge by the membership that comes only through study and prayer. Each is obligated to grow (Second Peter 3:19). It is not an optional matter. *"Study..."* is a command of Second Timothy 2:15). Can we afford to deliberately forsake opportunities to learn more of God's will as revealed in the Scriptures?

Members of the church have the duty to hold up the hands of the preachers who come their way when they teach the truth, and to resist and oppose any who do not preach sound doctrine. No church will long remain spiritually strong before God that is not concerned with sound doctrine and purity of the message of truth. Are you doing your part in standing by truth?

We want those who visit in our services, strangers, newcomers, to feel welcome among us. We need to show a genuine interest and concern for them. Hospitality and courtesy is the least we can offer (Hebrews 13:1). We may

know that we are glad they are with us, but are we attentive to our part in making sure that they know it?

Do not wait until somebody else speaks to you. Speak to them first. They may be a visitor just waiting for some warm, sincere, and kind greeting. We owe it to the local church to create that atmosphere of people being wanted. This ought not be an artificial, pretended show of interest but because our interest is genuine.

The Leadership

We want the local church to have good leadership. We all must exercise great caution in the selection of those who serve as leaders in any capacity. But alongside good leadership must be good followship. This we all can help make a reality.

Those who lead are men, just human beings, not infallible. They are subject to making mistakes, doctrinally and in matters of judgment, like other people. Collectively they work at leading as an eldership. But their mistakes are kept at a minimum when they realize that those they lead are behind them, encourage them, appreciate their efforts, and try to cooperate with them as best they can. When a member is assigned a duty, or assumes some responsibility, he owes it to the local church and the leadership to discharge that duty to the very best of his human ability. It is the Lord's work that is involved. Loyalty to leadership is not necessarily an endorsement of every decision they are called upon to make in every matter of human judgment. We should strive for unity in matters of doctrine, and exercise consideration toward any who might differ with us in any matter. Some brethren, sometimes even elders, seem to have forgotten there is a "golden rule."

We must take their leadership seriously (First Timothy 5:19), and not be too eager to hear and pass along some criticism. Leaders sometimes fail. But let it never be because their followers failed them.

Some brethren make leading so difficult. How would you like to lead an army like the one we now describe. Picture a squadron of men called for drill and the

morning roll call. The sergeant calls out, "Smith. Where is Smith?" Somebody explains that Smith has a new boat and has gone to the lake. Then the sergeant calls for Jones. "Where is Jones?" Well, Jones had company and could not make it this time. He said he would see him next roll call. "Where is Brown?" It just so happened that Brown was cleaning his car. Someone said Brown had said this was about the only time he could get it done because he was so busy the rest of the time. "Where is Adams?" Well, it then is brought to light that the sergeant had said something that offended Adams and he just was not going to come back until the sergeant apologized. As for Thompson, he just overslept. But White was there, because he did not have anything else to do that morning.

How would you like to lead an army that had no more loyalty to duty than these soldiers? Yet, that is what many elderships have to lead. Are we like some of these?

Vital Signs

We want the local church to be active, alive, vigorous, and enthusiastic. But, although many brethren do not believe it, without faithful attendance at the worship services, this quality will be lacking. Worship is a privilege as well as a duty. Poor attendance will cause a local church to dry up and die.

When you get sick and go to the doctor, he checks your vital signs like blood pressure, heartbeat rate, temperature, insurance policy, and other things of importance to your health. Attendance is one of the vital signs of a local church. While we are not interested in numbers for the sake of numbers about which to brag, we are concerned for souls. When members of the local church have a habit of being irresponsible in attendance it saps the life out of a church regardless of how fine the preacher, eldership, building, etc. We owe it to the local church to be present at the local assemblies faithfully as often as physically possible.

Our contribution ought be into the local treasury also. While we may visit, and even make many contributions to worthwhile causes, the bulk of our giving should be at

home. This is because the home expenses continue even though we might have to be elsewhere on a given Sunday. Make sure our contribution finds it way home.

The local church should be one that is a winner of souls. *"He that winneth souls is wise."* (Proverbs 11:30). We have a duty to the local church to make the effort to convert others. Most churches leave that almost entirely to the preacher, possibly one or two others. This is one reason we are not converting more than we are. Are members supposed to care for the lost, or just a select few? The early church was characterized by the membership taking the gospel to the lost wherever they went.

The home church ought to be a church of great warmth. It ought to be a refuge from the storms of life. There should exist consideration, genuine concern, and love throughout the membership. *"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."* (John 13:35).

Something to Cut Out

There is no place among members of the local church for cutting, harsh, calloused indifference and bitter words, How earthly parents are grieved when children tear at each other. Is God any less displeased? Yet, we have seen and known brethren who seem to delight in creating hard feelings, saying unkind things, provoking all manner of hurt for their brethren, and acting as if they did not even belong to the same spiritual family. We have heard members the church do this to one another, and to preachers, elders, and deacons.

Personality peculiarities, petty problems, varying views in matters of judgment are not to be allowed to cast a frigid chill over the warmth of brotherly love. When this happens, the local church is hurt by it, and the Lord will hold the guilty responsible for creating a bad climate. We need to ask, "What kind of church would this church be, if every member was just like me?"

* * * * *

Doctrines Common in Denominationalism

It is reported that there are over two thousand denominations in America. They differ in many ways, such as different types of government and organization, ways of worship, doctrines taught, creeds followed, and names worn. While most denominationalists say one denomination is as good as another, yet, each promotes his denomination above all the others. The hard truth is that denominationalism is not of God, not taught or authorized from the Scriptures, but exists contrary to what the Bible teaches regarding the church. The Lord's church is not a denomination.

Even though denominations have many differences and are divided in many ways, there are some doctrines many hold in common. Some of the things they teach and believe are true, such as the existence of God, Jesus is God's Son (although many deny the Biblical evidences of His Deity, such as the virgin birth, miracles, His resurrection), that man is accountable to God, and have varying degrees of respect for the Bible. But they also hold some common, basic, fundamental positions that are contrary to the Word of God. Some of these we wish to consider in this lesson. We study this material because we do not ever want to be caught up in denominational errors, which some are inclined to allow to stand simply because so many hold them. We need to know the truth and shun the false ways of men. *"But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."* (Matthew 15:9). *"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).

Salvation by Faith Alone

Many denominations teach that salvation is by faith alone and have that in their creeds and manuals. They say, "Just accept Jesus as the Christ. Just accept Him as your personal Savior. Only believe." Some encourage

people to acknowledge their faith by raising their hands, send in cards, come forward and receive some literature, and other means to indicate their faith. No response of obedience is required other than to indicate, "I believe." Of course, if this is the way of salvation to the exclusion of anything else, as they teach, this means obedience is unnecessary. While some of them say that faith includes obedience, that necessarily involves a contradiction to their "faith only" doctrine. They want it both ways.

Notice some Biblical facts. *"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only."* (James 2:24). Is it not strange that the only place "faith" and "only" come together in Scripture it teaches the very opposite of what denominationalists teach? These works by which one is justified are not works of merit, or of one's own righteousness, but works of obedience.

"And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." (Hebrews 5:9). Are we to think that the absence of obedience means Jesus will be the author of our salvation anyway?

"In flaming fire taking vengeance of them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Second Thessalonians 1:8). This demands something in addition to believing. It teaches obedience in the plan of salvation.

"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21). Obviously, those that would cry, "Lord, Lord," believe. According to denominational doctrines that ought suffice for their salvation. But according to Jesus there was more required. That which is required to be saved from past sins includes faith, repentance, confession of faith in Christ as the Son of God, and baptism for the remission of sins. This is to be followed by a faithful life.

God's people must militantly oppose and expose such false doctrines that deceive and mislead people into a false security. Such doctrines cause people to close their eyes to the truth. But if we love God, His truth, and the souls of others, we will resist such false doctrines as

salvation by faith alone. It is not what God's Word teaches.

Honesty, Not Doctrine

Many denominationalists, realizing the widespread confusion and division in doctrinal matters among them, have concluded that doctrine is of no significance anyway, and all that matters is that one be honest and sincere in what they believe, whatever it is. It has been said, "One faith is as good as another. Choose the faith of your choice. Doctrinal difference makes no difference." Others have added that God will not condemn an honest man. Is that the truth?

Paul was an honest man before he was converted. Was he saved even as he persecuted and made havoc of the Lord's church? Did God smile upon him anyway? While honesty and sincerity are certainly two qualities that must exist in the heart of one who follows Christ, one can have both of them and still follow the devil. Where is the Biblical basis for contending that is matters not what one believes so long as he is honest and sincere? Do not those who so assert have any obligation to show that to be true from the Word of God? Or are we all supposed to accept it because denominationalists have declared it?

There is "*one faith*." (Ephesians 4:4). We are to "*earnestly contend for the faith*." (Jude 3). Paul "*kept the faith*." (Second Timothy 4:7). Having "*a faith*" is not necessarily having "*the faith*."

Discount Baptism

Most denominations degrade and consider baptism unnecessary even though most practice something or another that they call baptism. Some do not baptize (immerse), but sprinkle and/or pour water on their subjects. Others will baptize (immerse) for reasons others than what the Scripture teaches. Some denominations call for something called baptism in order to "join" their denomination, but not to go to heaven. They make it more difficult to get into their man-made religious organization than they do to go to

heaven. If they can go to heaven without a denomination, why ever belong to one? But this denial of the necessity of baptism is a "must" because they teach salvation by faith alone. While the Lord's church is falsely accused of preaching "water salvation," as if the power of salvation is in the water itself, denominationalists want to "dry clean" everybody.

What does the Bible teach? Baptism is immersion (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:3,4), in water (Acts 8:36; 10:47), in the name of Christ (Acts 2:38; 19:5), for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), or to be saved (Mark 16:16), at which time one is also baptized into the body (First Corinthians 12:13), which is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23), because God adds the baptized ones thereto (Acts 2:47). We are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27), and into His death (Romans 6:3,4), where His blood was shed (John 19:34), and by which we are justified (Romans 5:9). Because we reach His blood in baptism, Peter wrote, "*...baptism doth now also save us...*" (First Peter 3:21).

One as Good as Another

Denominationalists often teach that one church is just as good as another church. They do not practice that, but only say that. If that be so, why not join them all and get the good out of all of them? We will agree that one denomination is as good as another, but none or them exist by the authority of God. The Lord's church is not a denomination, has no kinship or fellowship with denominations, oppose the division, confusion, and false doctrines that pour from denominations. Nor is the church the sum total of all the denominations. There is nothing Biblical about denominationalism. If so, take your Bible and show us where!

The church is the house or family of God (First Timothy 3:15), the kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13), the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23), the one body (Ephesians 4:4), the saved (Acts 2:47). Nobody is taught from Scripture to "join" the Lord's church, but we are all taught to obey the commands of the gospel and when we do God adds us to the company of the saved, which is the church (Acts 2:47). How can denominationalists read the prayer of Jesus for unity, read Paul's condemnation of division,

and still have the gall to promote a system of religion that propagates, thrives on, and is sustained by division? Why cannot people be content with the church as the Bible reveals it without trying to change it to suit people rather than submit to God?

When we sow the seed of the kingdom, which is the Word of God (Luke 8:11), it will produce the kingdom, or church. One must sow the tares of the doctrines of men to produce denominations.

Nothing in a Name

Denominationalists say there is nothing in a name. The reason they say this is because denominations wear all kinds of names religiously, few being found in Scripture at all. But they do not believe their contention when it comes to their practice, or even in other matters, but only in matters religious. They consider names important in business, on products, in marriage. They do not name their children "Fido," and their dogs after their grandparents. The teaching is false and their practice is hypocritical.

What does the Bible teach? Isaiah 62:22 tells us that God would call His people by a new name, once both Jews and Gentiles were included. Acts 11:26 reports, "*And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch,*" the first congregation to include both Jews and Gentiles. Paul gave sanction to this name in Acts 26:28, as did Peter in First Peter 4:16. It is not a name of derision given to disciples of Christ by their enemies, but a name that honors the Son of God and given by God Himself through inspired men. But denominations wear names that honor men, governmental systems, religious rites, names that only divide people one from the other.

Abuse of the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is abused by denominationalists because they do not observe it as the New Testament teaches it is to be observed, either in the matter of when, or the meaning of it. In fact, in some denominations, observance of the Lord's Supper is not required at all. Some will make a big show of something called the

Lord's Supper during Easter or Christmas, maybe even at weddings and "infant baptisms." Catholics call it a "mass," which to them means a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ, even though the Bible says He was offered once (Hebrews 9:28).

The Lord's Supper does not exist by the authority of the church, but of Christ. He instituted it (Matthew 26:26-28; First Corinthians 11:23-30). We are commanded to observe it as a memorial to Christ, in His memory, commemorating Him, emphasizing His sacrifice, in His kingdom, until He come again. The physical elements of the fruit of the vine and the unleavened bread represent the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

The early church observed the Lord's Supper in their assembly (First Corinthians 11) on the first day of the week (First Corinthians 16:1,2). We have the example of brethren meeting on the first day of the week for this purpose (Acts 20:7). The early church was stedfast in this practice (Acts 2:42). This demands regularity, and how regular. To legislate one first day to the exclusion of other first days is without divine authority.

Even though secular history is not our authority in religion, it is noteworthy that secular historians tell us the early church met each first day of the week to eat the Lord's Supper as a memorial to Christ.

Other Common Errors

There are others denominational doctrines and practices we could name, such as the use of instrumental music in worship, clergy and laity, women preachers, the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, permissiveness toward worldliness, such as dancing, drinking alcoholic beverages, smoking, etc.

The spirit and action of denominationalism runs counter to New Testament teaching and shows great disrespect for the only religious authority we have, the Bible. The Lord's church must respect Biblical teaching and oppose every false way.

* * * * *

The Legalism of Grace

The Bible says much about the grace of God, but many are not really aware or informed regarding it. It is not surprising to Bible students that much is heard about God's grace. We rely on and are the recipients of the benefits of His grace. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:4,8,9, *"Ye are saved by grace."* Romans 3:24, *"Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."* Titus 3:7, *"That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."* That we are saved by grace is indisputable.

Grace

But what is grace? Grace is a favor bestowed that is unmerited, unearned, underserved, but received anyway. God has favored man with the way of salvation. Man did not deserve to be saved. He cannot earn his salvation. But because of what God has done, man can be saved. We are not to think, however, that salvation is by grace alone because there are several components in God's plan for saving man that are built upon the grace of God.

It is unfortunate that some have misused the teaching about the grace of God as to eliminate the absolute necessity of obedience to the commands of God. Some speak of grace versus law, as if the two concepts are antagonistic against each other.

Law

But what is law? Law is a rule that exists by authority. It consists of commandments, ordinances, judgments, statutes, precepts, regulations, prohibitions, instructions. Law implies authority. In the case of God's law, we are dealing with God's authority.

There are several passages that teach we are *"free from the law."* But we must examine them in context lest we conclude that one does not even have to obey God's law.

John 1:17, "*For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*" God gave Israel a law through Moses. But that law is not the only law in the Bible. Law existed before Moses ever lived. There are other laws. This passage teaches that we are not saved by the law of Moses, but by the grace and truth that came through Christ. But the truth of Christ includes law.

Romans 3:20, "*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.*" This does not negate all law, but that Mosaic law is not the way of salvation from sin. Sin can be defined and known for what it is through Moses' law, but that law did not provide for forgiveness. But this is far from saying that grace and law are incompatible.

Similar teaching is found in Romans 6:14. "*For sin shall not have dominion over you; for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*" This means we are under a different system than the Mosaic system, but under the system of Christ. It does not teach there is no law to which we are still accountable.

The same teaching is found in Galatians 2:16, "*Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ.*" There is a wide difference in saying we are not saved by the law of Moses and saying there is no law to which we must respond.

Galatians 5:4, "*Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.*" Anyone who would expect to be saved by the law of Moses is not relying as he should on the way of salvation by grace through Christ.

Grace and Law

But there is law in the grace of Christ. In other words, there is legalism in the system of grace. Legalism is conforming to law. Legalism, conforming to God's law, is to complement God's grace in bringing man to salvation. Let us see this illustration. When a man makes a will and states certain conditions that must be met before the distribution of his estate, the conditions do not render ineffective the grace of the will maker. The existence of

his will is a demonstration of his grace toward his heirs. He was not obligated to give them anything. But he offers them something from his estate by his grace. But he may well stipulate certain conditions his heirs must meet before they receive what he offers. But the fact that he makes the conditions does not mean the conditions are incompatible, inconsistent, or an infringement upon his graciousness toward them. Rather, the conditions are the means for carrying out his grace. The conditions are laws that must be obeyed. So it is with the grace of God, His laws, and our salvation.

Let us see that there is law in the system of grace. Galatians 6:2, "*Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ.*" There is a law of Christ. This cannot be denied. We are obligated to obey His law.

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.*" Grace refers to what God has done to save man. Faith refers to what man must do to be saved. To further show no incompatibility between grace and works, consider the very next verse. "*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.*" God expects works of us. How could we conclude that works and grace are antagonistic?

Romans 5:2, "*By whom we also have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand...*" It is by man's conformity in faith to what the Lord has commanded that we enter into the benefits and blessings provided by God's grace.

When Paul was writing of the promise for all men that was given through Abraham, he wrote, "*Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace...*" (Romans 4:16). Both grace (God's part), and faith (man's part), are essential. One without the other avails nothing for mankind.

No Conflict

Nor can we ever conclude conflict between faith and law. Romans 1:17, "*The just shall live by faith.*" Life with God can be mine and yours through a system that demands faith. But in this same letter Paul wrote of the "*law of*

faith" (Romans 3:27). Notice the harmony that exists between grace, faith, and law!

We are not saved by the law of works of our own righteousness (Titus 3:3-5), nor by the works of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9), nor by the works of the Mosaic Law (Romans 3:20,27), nor can we earn salvation. This does not mean there is no law in the plan of salvation, or that salvation is by grace alone.

As far as the law of Moses is concerned, *"For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth."* (Romans 10:4). The word "end" refers to a target, goal, the reason for existence, the purpose involved. It is used in First Peter 1:9 explaining that salvation is the end of our faith. Such teaching regarding the law of Moses is harmonious with Galatians 3:23-25, *"But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards 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."*

The law of Moses did not provide forgiveness (Hebrews 7:19; 10:4). But to reach heaven we must conform to the *"perfect law of liberty"* (James 1:25). This is the law of truth, because one is made free by the truth (John 8:32).

Free From What Law?

Some false teachers try to make much of the teaching that we are delivered from the law. But from what law are we delivered? Are we free from the laws of nature, such as gravity, heat, sowing and reaping? Certainly not!

Are we delivered from civil law? No! (Romans 13; First Peter 2). Are we delivered from the law governing morality? The grace of God, and obedience to His law, makes morality a prime obligation upon all mankind. The "do your own thing" doctrine is contrary to the law of Christ, and His grace is not to be used as liberty and licence for lasciviousness (Galatians 5:15; Jude 4). We are not delivered from the *"royal law"* of James 2:8), or the *"law of God"* (Romans 7:22). By the *"law of the Spirit of*

life in Christ Jesus" we are made free from the law of sin and death (Romans 6:2). We are not free from all law.

Romans 8:1-4, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God, sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit."

There are three laws mentioned in that text. The law of sin and death is defined in Romans 6:23 and James 1:15. The law of Moses was not capable of delivering us from the law of sin and death because one could not live perfectly under that law. But another law, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, the law that is a part of the same system of salvation as the grace of God, that law can and does save man from the law of sin and death. It does so because by obedience to that law man partakes of the grace of God.

Perfect Harmony

Where then is grace, if there is law to obey? Grace provided the way of salvation, the blood of Christ, by which we are saved (Romans 5:9). Obedience brings us into that grace. What we obey is the law of Christ.

There is legalism, law keeping, in the system of grace that cannot be dismissed. Grace teaches us (Titus 2:11,12) how and what we must do to be the peculiar people that God wants.

We frustrate the grace of God (Galatians 2:11) when we do not obey the law that fits perfectly within the same system of salvation as the grace of God.

One final thought: if salvation is by grace alone, who made that law? Even then, how do you escape law?

* * * * *

Curse Ye Meroz

Judges 5:23, "*Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord; curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof...*"

Israel, God's chosen people, even with all the advantages given them, were, in the period of the Judges under consideration, alienated from God because they had forsaken the ways of the Lord. As was so often the case, God determined to chasten them because of their backsliding and bring them to repentance.

God still chastens those He loves. Hebrews 12:6, "*For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*" While there are some that consider all chastening to reveal a lack of love, the discipline, rebuking and training that one receives is because of love. Those left simply go their own way and "do their own thing" are not loved as they should be.

God often used the nations around Israel as instruments to chasten His own people. Even though these nations were not righteous, and served heathen gods, they could be used by the Lord for benefit to His own people. In this circumstance in our lesson, God used Jabin, king of Canaan, and his army under the leadership of Sisera, the captain, to humble the disgressive Israelites.

Under the Judges

The history of Israel during the period of the Judges is not a glorious period for Israel. They would repeatedly fluctuate between serving God and serving idols that they had learned to follow from the nations around them. Their loyalty to God was stained with periods of disloyalty. While they were enjoying prosperity, they would turn from the true God of heaven, the source of their prosperity, and serve their selfish interests and gods other than Jehovah. Then God would allow them to be humbled. In their humbled state, whether in bondage or under local captivity, they would repent and return to the Lord. At this, God would raise up a deliverer, a judge, who would lead the people in their time of crisis and throw off the yoke and burden imposed by the

persecuting forces. Once the enemy was subdued, for a time Israel would again show loyalty to God and God would allow them to prosper. But before long, the cycle of apostasy and prosperity would repeat itself.

Our Setting

At this time the leaders of the people were Deborah and Barak. Under their leadership Israel went against Jabin, having repented of their backsliding. God gave them a great victory over Sisera and the armies of Canaan.

But there was a real problem concerning the people of Meroz. They took no part in the conflict. They could have assisted and they should have. They had the opportunity and could have made significant contributions toward the welfare of the entire nation. But they chose to remain aloof from the struggle and refused to help even their own people.

The location of Meroz is not definitely known, although it is thought to have occupied a strategic location where they could have guarded a mountain pass and prevented the escape of the men of Canaan once they were being routed. They could have acted in a manner that would have had a lasting effect for Israel, but they did nothing. The angel of the Lord said they were to be cursed bitterly because of their failure. The last part of our text reads, "*because they came not to the help of Jehovah, to the help of Jehovah against the mighty.*" By failing to help God's people against the enemies of God and His people they were declared deserving of being cursed bitterly.

Let us see the situation clearly. Here was a struggle between truth and error, the true God versus false gods, heathenism against the living God, God's people against the servants of the devil. God was on the side of Israel. Why should not Meroz also be there in the conflict?

Do we not learn from this? When we fail to lend assistance to the people of God, whose people we also profess to be, and there is this battle and struggle of right against wrong, are we not guilty of the same failure as that which brought reproach against Meroz?

When the Lord appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus, he asked, "*Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?*" (Acts 9:24). Saul was actually persecuting the church, binding men and women and putting them in prison, consenting unto their death, because of their faith in Christ. But in so doing, Jesus said he was persecuting Him. Surely, if persecuting the church is to persecute Christ, then to help the Lord's church is to render help to the Christ. It follows that withholding help from the Lord's church is to withhold help from the Lord Himself. We can easily see this is true.

A Constant Warfare

Christians must constantly keep in mind the age-old struggle and battle that is in progress. It is the warfare between truth and error, righteousness and unrighteousness, good against evil, right versus wrong, the forces of Satan as they war against the forces of God. Each side is equipped with an arsenal of weapons with which to fight this spiritual warfare. Nobody can content himself or herself to attempt a neutral stance in this struggle. As Jesus taught, we are either for Him or against Him. An attempt to assume a neutral position is to choose to not be for Him. There is no middle ground. This is the mistake that the inhabitants of Meroz made when the time for their assistance was presented.

The nature of the gospel, and the person of Jesus Christ necessitates a decision. It is inescapable. A decision not to help the Lord is a decision that deserves curses of damnation. While there are some matters of life in which we can afford to be indifferent and there be no serious consequences, this is not so regarding service to God and allegiance to Christ.

Opposing God's People

It is a serious thing to oppose the people of God as they are involved in doing the Lord's will. It is equally serious to fail to lend assistance when needed in carrying out the work for Christ. Whenever we are able to help and have opportunity to help we have a corresponding obligation to help. If we do not, in what

way are we different from the people of Meroz of long ago that displeased God?

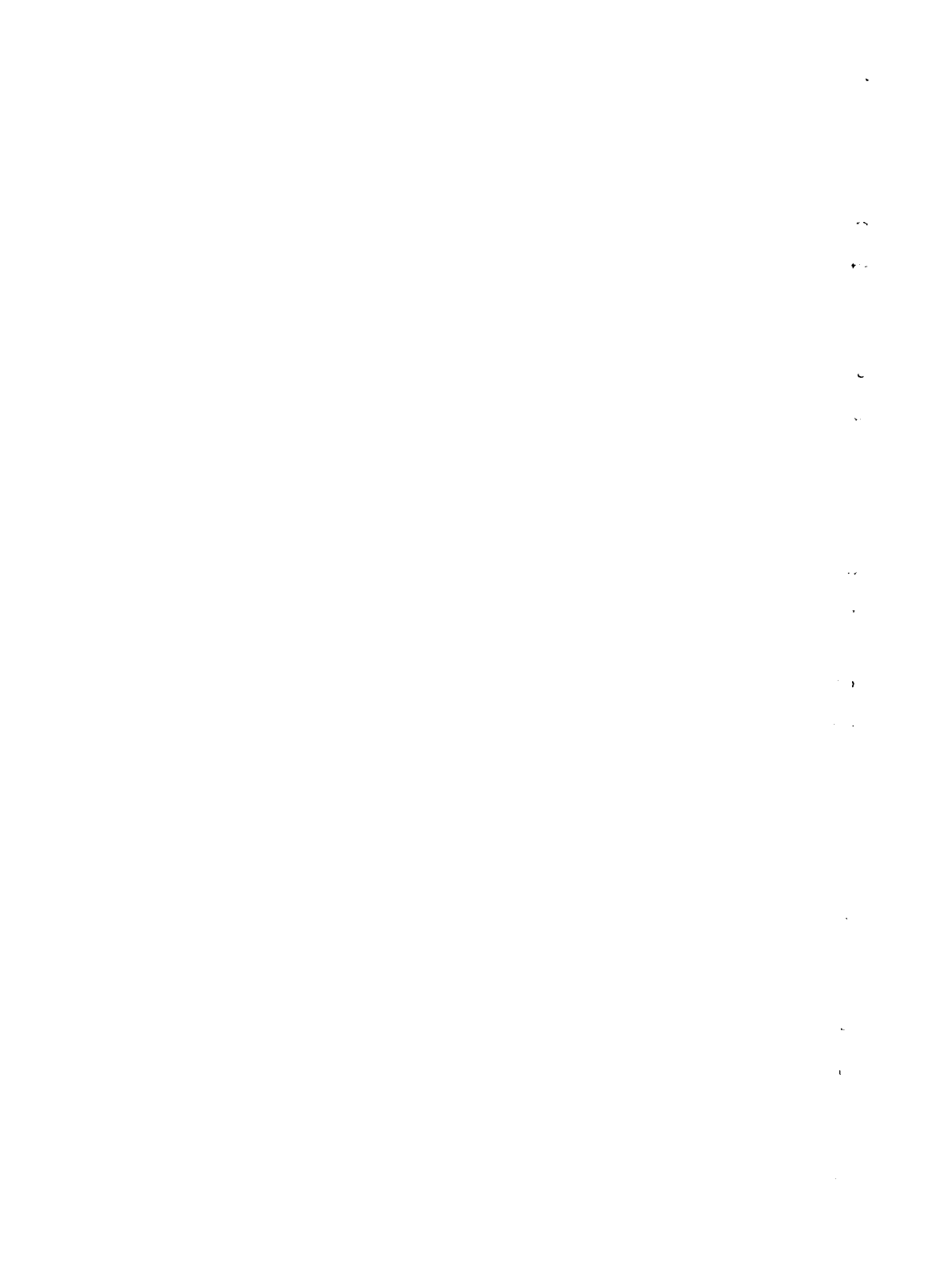
Chapter twenty-five of Matthew pictures the judgment scene. Jesus said in verse forty, "*Inasmuch as ye did it not unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it not unto me.*" This chapter is noteworthy, not only because of the judgment scene, the separation of the sheep from the goats, but the reasons given for the distinctions between them. A close reading of verses thirty-one through forty-six teaches that both were judged according to what they did, or did not do, with respect to something that ought to have been done. The sins of adultery, stealing, lying, murder, etc. are not named against those that were banished into punishment. Condemnation of such things is taught elsewhere in the Scriptures. But those condemned were condemned because of what they did not do; because of their failure to lend assistance as they ought.

James wrote, "*To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.*" (James 4:17).

We need to consider this principle when there is a gospel meeting, when there is a call for work, when the needy need help., when the bereaved are suffering, when the discouraged need uplifting, when the truth is under attack from within and without, when the church is being degraded, when helping hands are wanted. We dare not think we can behave as did those of Meroz and still be looked upon with favor by the Lord. They were cursed bitterly. Shall we receive a different recompense if we are guilty of the same transgression?

Today, as the church is bashed right and left by liberals and modernists, as the Deity of Christ is attacked, as the Bible is set aside in favor of the "scholarship" of self-appointed experts, we sometimes see and hear brethren that shy away from the fight. They may not join the forces of error directly, but they give Satan assistance by not coming to the stde of faithful brethren who are contending for the faith. This is a serious breach on the part of many. Let it not be so insinuated among you.

* * * * *



The Lord's Church In God's Plan

In a very real sense it can be said that the Lord's plan for the salvation of man IS the church. This we shall explain as we proceed. When we realize what the church is, what it is supposed to be and do, we shall see that this is not an unfair or exaggerated position. In a time such as ours when many degrade the church, declare it non-essential, and even ridicule emphasis on the church, bypassing it in the work and worship of God, we need to consult once again the Bible and learn how the church fits God's plan, indeed, is the plan in evidence and demonstration.

Until members of the church are thoroughly informed regarding the church and its proper place in God's scheme of things, we are not likely to aggressively pursue the work nor be active in fulfilling our purposes.

Not a Substitute or Afterthought

The premillennial theory teaches that the church is only a temporary substitute for the failure or change of God's plan regarding the establishment of His kingdom. It is considered as a secondary provision after the Jews rejected Christ. That Christ was to establish the kingdom is well established in Scripture. It is also true that Jews, as a nation, rejected Him, although not all did because the first church was composed of Jews. It is true that Jesus returned to heaven, and will return. But when He returns, it will not be to establish the kingdom He failed to establish the first time. He succeeded in establishing the kingdom. Next time He will come and deliver the kingdom to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24). The kingdom is the church and the church is the kingdom. They are not separate institutions.

If Christ failed to establish the kingdom the first time, then all the Old Testament prophecies were wrong, the prophets were false prophets, even though directed by God. Even Jesus would be a false prophet because He declared the kingdom was "*at hand*," as did John the

Baptist, the twelve apostles, and the seventy that Jesus sent forth. Eighty-four men, guided by Deity, declared the kingdom to be "*at hand*" in that first century. Were they all wrong? Did Christ fail to establish the kingdom, or postpone it, and build the church as a substitute measure until He comes again? ABSOLUTELY NOT! The church is the kingdom. Those who are members of the church are the citizens of the kingdom (Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:9). The fact that the Jews rejected Christ did not alter God's plan. Romans 3:3,4, "*For what if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid; yea, let God be true, but every man a liar, as it is written, That thou mightest overcome when thou art judged.*"

Before the Beginning

The church was in God's plan even before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4), even according to God's eternal purpose (Ephesians 3:8-12). The establishment of the church was that which had been prophesied, especially by the prophet Joel (Acts 2:16). It was on that same day of Pentecost that people who were obedient to the gospel were added to the church (Acts 2:47).

The term "church" is used in several senses in the New Testament. It is significant that it is never used with reference to denominationalism in any form. There is no Biblical authority for the existence of any denomination that has, does, or ever shall exist. The word "church" means "called out." Those in the church have been called out of darkness into light, called out of the world into Christ, called out of sin into salvation, called out of Satan's dominion into the kingdom of God.

This call comes by the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14; Romans 1:16). The church is composed of saved people. It is set forth by various figures in the Bible as a body with Christ as the head (Ephesians 1:22,23), as a kingdom with Christ as King (Colossians 1:13), as the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5), as a building with Christ as the builder and foundation (Matthew 16:16-18; First Corinthians 3:11), as a family with God as the Father and Christians as His children (First Timothy 3:15; Romans 8:16).

The Saved

The word "church" is used with reference to the saved everywhere, the church universal (Matthew 16:16-18; Colossians 1:18). It is used with reference to local churches or congregations (Romans 16:16; First Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:2; Revelation 1,2,3). It is also used with reference to the local church assembled in worship (First Corinthians 11:18).

The local congregations of the New Testament, although beset with frailties, were organized alike, taught alike to believe and walk by the same rule, and were the church of Christ. They shared the "*common salvation*" (Jude 3). It is that church which we are interested in restoring for our own time.

I heard a liberal once ask, "Which church are we going to restore? Shall we restore the Jerusalem church, the church at Rome, the church at Ephesus. etc.?" Inasmuch as the Lord's church is what is revealed in the New Testament, this is that in which we are interested. These churches were united in the matters of faith, even though there were members who were not always walking faithfully. Such remarks often are heard from people who really have no interest in restoring the New Testament church, but prefer to follow their own plan that allows everybody to do whatever they wish.

It is God's intent that we have membership in a local church. A local church is the largest governmental organization of which we read in the New Testament for the church, other than Christ being head of the church. Too many have adopted a "floating" policy where they go hither, there, and yon and never assume responsibility anywhere for anything. Being a bunch of "jumping grasshoppers" never will build up anything. We are not talking about an occasional visit with brethren in other places. But we are concerned about those upon whom you can never depend, will not take any assignment, will not be identified with any congregation, and do not feel any sense of duty anywhere in particular and nowhere in general. When Paul came into Jerusalem he desired to "join" himself to the Christians there. Thanks to Barnabas, after some reluctance by the Jerusalem

brethren to accept him because of his reputation as a persecutor, Paul became one among the saints there.

Governing the Local Church

God has assigned elders to oversee the work and affairs of the local church. Christians are taught, *"Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation... Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you."* (Hebrews 13:7,17). Elders have the oversight of the flock (First Peter 5:2), but cannot shepherd the flock if the flock scatters of its own will and refuses to be assisted. Those who "jump about" do not take advantage of one of the God-given safeguards against apostasy.

In a day when rebellion against authority is so common, it is not commendable for children of God to refuse to commit themselves under the oversight of the system of rule that God has devised. To remain aloof from the local church and fail to cooperate in that organization is to run roughshod over a part of God's plan for man.

The organization of the church is relatively simple, especially when compared with the systems designed by men. Christ is the King or Head of the church. The headquarters of the church is where the Head is; namely, in heaven. There is no earthly head of the Lord's church, nor any ecclesiastical system larger than a local congregation.

The local church is overseen by elders, served by deacons, taught by preachers and teachers, with every member making up the membership of the body. This is neither complicated nor difficult to understand, but when executed as God has designed it, it is the most effective and efficient system one can consider.

Ephesians 1:22,23, *"And hath put all things under his feet and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."*

As surely as Jesus Christ is adequate and sufficient, so is His church, which is His body.

The Work

What is the church to do? We have already seen what it is to be. It is the saved. The mission of the Lord's church is to be carried out through the autonomous local congregations. While congregations may cooperate with each other in doing various works, no congregation may assume the oversight of another congregation. It takes the combined effort of all the saved to perform the work that the Lord has given the church to do. This does not permit some kind of organizational structure that would overshadow the local church, but it means that each Christian and each congregation must be busy at the task if the work is going to be done.

The work of the church that is primary is to be the "*pillar and ground of the truth.*" (First Timothy 3:15). It is to carry forward the mission of Christ to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). There are duties for the individual and the congregation collectively. Sometimes these duties will even overlap, but even so they are not always identical. The church is to go forward with that great charge that Jesus uttered just prior to His ascension into heaven. "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*" (Mark 16:15). The early church understood that and that comprised their basic and fundamental work. We must understand that today.

The church also has a responsibility to relieve the distressed. There are some who contend that the church sins if it gives assistance to anyone except those of God's family. They cannot even assist an orphaned child from the funds given by Christian into the local church treasury. Does anyone really consider such a disposition Christlike in nature? Did Christ confine His benevolence just to those of the house of Israel, God's children during His ministry? Are we not to imitate Christ? Great stress is given by some that helping the needy outsider is strictly and exclusively a duty of individuals. Yet, when questioned, how few of those who so contend provide for orphaned children in any way! How few help the needy children! How few ever help

anybody. They claim they cannot afford it even as they ride about in new cars, watch big-screen televisions, etc. Such hypocrisy is deserving of stout rebuke. Whether an individual or the local church, pure religion involves visiting the fatherless and the widows in their affliction (James 1:27). Who wants to be in a church that cannot practice pure religion? Paul wrote Galatians 6:10 to churches.

The church can help widows (First Timothy 5:16), but not orphans (James 1:27)? While the church cannot be the home for the homeless, it can provide a home for the homeless. When it does, it is doing a part of the work the Scriptures teach the church to be doing.

The church is to build itself up through edification (First Thessalonians 5:11), and strengthening its members by teaching (Matthew 28:18ff). Once one is baptized, he is as a babe in Christ, and must be afforded the "*sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby.*" (First Peter 2:2).

The church assembles for worship as well as carrying out the work. First and foremost the church is to bring glory to God by living as God would have people to live, serving as God would have them serve, worshipping as God would have them worship, and being busy in saving the lost souls from sin (Ephesians 3:21).

The Church and Salvation

Some have said, "The church does not save you." This is said to mean that it does not matter to which church you belong. But that is all wrong. In a sense the church does save you. Christ is the Savior. But the church has a role in saving people by preaching the gospel to all, without which there is no salvation (Romans 10:13-17). The church is composed of the saved. The church that does not emphasize the mission of preaching and teaching the truth, by which we are set free (John 8:32), is failing. Too many churches today have opted for recreation, entertainment, gymnasiums, parties, festivals, trips, cook-outs, playgrounds, etc., even hiring "ministers" to conduct such affairs. Where is authority for such things? Little wonder churches are not held in respect as they once were! Many have become the poor man's country

club. Others have become so worldly centered and worldly minded that the gospel finds little place in their affairs. They may be big, with lots of money, popular, politically powerful, have impressive buildings, and big salaries for the "staff," but that is not what God teaches and we ought to have more respect for His Word than to promote such things, even when these things themselves may not be sinful. They are not the work of the church nor reflect comprehension by the members of such churches as to what the church is, and what it is to do.

We said at the start that the church IS God's plan for saving man. God's seeks salvation, and the church is at the center of it because the church is the saved. One must be in the church to be counted among the saved. He must be in the church to serve as he ought. One enters the church the same way he is saved from his past sins. He must hear the word, believe in Christ as the Son of God, repent of his sins, confess his faith in Christ, and be baptized in water for the remission of sins. Then God adds him to the church (Acts 2:47). The existence of the church is the demonstration and exhibition of God's plan for saving man (Ephesians 3:10).

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Influence

We are studying a matter of greater power than most of us realize. Anything that has great power must be used with great care. The power of influence is staggering and actually beyond our ability to measure to its fullest because it is so great and far reaching. Influence is a quality that everyone possesses in varying degrees. This study, therefore, is very applicable to everyone who reads these words. It should be of great concern to every Christian. What we have in mind for this lesson is not to deal with many specifics, but to stress the reality of the existence of influence, and the kinds of influence.

What Is It?

What is influence? Influence is a moral and spiritual force that has the power and capacity to effect other people, conditions, and situations. Jesus presented this moral force in two figures in the Sermon on the Mount. It is as salt. Matthew 5:13, *"Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the foot of men."*

Again, it is as light. Matthew 5:14-16, *"Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither to 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. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."*

Influence is pictured also as leaven. Matthew 13:33, *"Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."* Paul recognized this analogy between leaven and influence when he wrote, *"Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?"* (First Corinthians 5:6).

Two Kinds

There are two kinds of influence. Some influence is bad and detrimental to those it touches. It is harmful to those who are affected by it. It leads people away from God rather than toward God. Such was the influence of Solomon's wives upon him and led him into idolatry. (First Kings 11:1-3). The influence of the Pharisees was harmful. Matthew 23:13, *"But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in."* Consider the influence of that which is called Jezebel in Revelation 2:20, *"Notwithstanding, I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed unto idols."* This may refer to a person or an evil influence.

Even the influence of Peter was detrimental on one occasion in Antioch. Paul wrote in Galatians 2:13, *"And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; inasmuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation."* This was when Peter bowed beneath the pressure of Jewish brethren to disassociate himself from Gentile brethren. Paul warned, *"Evil companions corrupt good morals."* This is due to the power of influence (First Corinthians 15:33). Solomon wrote, *"Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroyeth much good."* (Ecclesiastes 9:18). This is due to influence.

But there is also good influence which helps others and goes a long way in leading others toward the right, straight, and good way. It is beneficial in nature. Such was the influence of Mordecai in Esther 4:14. When Esther balked at approaching the king of Persia on behalf of the Jews, Mordecai advised, *"For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place: but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed; and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"* This was encouragement enough for Esther to act courageously in bringing about deliverance for the Jews from the wicked and sinister plot of Haman.

Dorcas was a good influence. At her death, Peter was called by her friends. When he arrived it is said, *"When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber; and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them."* (Acts 9:9).

Consider the love and consideration shown by brethren toward Paul as he, as a prisoner, was making his way toward Rome. Acts 28:15, *"And from thence, when thy brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appiforum, and the three taverns; whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage."* Their influence was a good influence on Paul. We could name others, such as the influence of Lydia on her own household, like that of Cornelius on his household and the Jews, and the Philippian jailor on his family. The truth of the matter is that every word, deed, attitude, however small it may

seem, is either for good or for evil. Nothing said or done it totally without significance.

We All Have It

There is another fact that cannot be overlooked. Every person has influence either to use or abuse. Romans 14:7, "*For none of us liveth to himself; and no man dieth to himself.*" The teaching is that we all have influence, and there is no substance to the claim, "What I do is nobody's business but my own."

We are born with influence. The very entrance and presence into the world of a child changes almost everything around him. Just consider how it rearranges everything pertaining to the family. Meals, trips, work habits, rest, anything and everything must be adjusted because of the impact of the new person just born. That is powerful influence.

We influence other people and other people influence us. Influence is a two-way street. For this reason we must be careful regarding what we do, with whom we have close association, what we say, as well as what we allow ourselves to hear, what we permit ourselves to see. Such affects our thinking. Our conduct, appearance, speech, actions, attitudes, where we go, everything has a bearing on our influence.

Thankfully, there are many constructive influences in the world coming from many sources. We must seek those good influences and allow ourselves to be affected by them. This is reason enough to seek out Christians.

You might recall that following the crucifixion that Peter said, "*I go a fishing.*" Others said, "*We also go with thee.*" (John 21:3). Peter influenced them. Hosea 4:9, "*And there shall be, like people, like priest.*" This gives recognition of influence. Cannot we see the influence of the ten faithless spies who returned from spying out the land of Canaan and the effect they had on the entire nation of Israel? They "*made the heart of the people melt.*" (Joshua 14:8). Their influence was very detrimental.

Influence Keeps Working

Again, we never do lose our influence. Our influence may change from good to bad, or vice versa. But we always retain our influence to some degree even after we are dead. It is never quite exhausted. Even when redirected, it remains. Like radioactive materials, like the drop of radium on a wood floor, it can be brushed up, washed up, even burned, and traces of the activity will even be found in the ashes, in the water, on the brushes. It cannot be destroyed. Our influence has an eternal effect. What a sobering thought!

They do not bury our influence in the coffin when they bury our body. This can be a cause for rejoicing and a cause for regret, depending upon the kind of influence we have left behind us. 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."*

Hebrews 11:4, speaking of Abel, *"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and by it he being dead yet speaketh."* Hebrews twelve teaches us that we have a *"great crowd of witness"* who have left their mark on the world, who have left lessons to be learned, which are useful even now long after they have left the scene.

Did not Peter teach that possibly a faithful wife can influence her husband to become a child of God, not through constant preaching as much as by good example (First Peter 3:1-6)? That is a matter of influence. Consider the woman who anointed the head of Jesus in Matthew twenty-six. Jesus said of her, *"Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this that this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her."* Does not her influence live even yet?

The sins of Jeroboam infected the national life of Israel during his lifetime, but also long after he had died. When other kings did wickedly they were compare with the evil of Jeroboam. The iniquities of fathers have affected

generations (Exodus 34:7). Our influence can and will affect people we shall never meet, never know, and who will not even know our influence affects them. But it can, does, and will. Therefore, is it not evident that we must guard, protect, cherish, and properly use and never abuse our influence?

We Shall Answer For It

We shall stand before God in judgment and give account (Second Corinthians 5:10), and among those things for which we shall answer is what we did about influence. *Romans 14:13, "Let us not therefore judge one another any more, but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way."* First Corinthians 8:9,13, *"But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak... Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend."* In both of these passages Paul is concerned with influence on others. Matthew 18:6, *"But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."* How important is the use of our influence! We can never have the attitude, "I do not care what others think. What I do is my business alone." That is simply not so, and cannot be allowed in the lives of those who would profess to follow Christ.

One of the finest compliments that could be paid to an individual is that it is easier to be good when he or she is nearby. Thanks be to God for those people who are always sources of encouragement to follow the Lord, who live in such fashion as to make you want to do better.

We close these thought by telling of an instance that occurred in a place where I preached a gospel meeting. A young man, about twenty-three years of age, was baptized and his wife was restored. Because of their example, coupled with teaching, two sisters obeyed the gospel later in the week. Many people have been good examples in leading others to obey the gospel. On the other hand, many have set the wrong example and exerted a negative influence on others by their persistent

refusal to obey the gospel. We do not want nor expect people to obey Christ simply because somebody else does. But neither can we discount the tremendous influence for good that is exerted when one comes forward to obey Christ.

Parents need to think seriously about the influence they have on their children when they refuse to come to Christ and they live their lives before their children. What a glorious influence is used when they obey. The children learned by their influence that the way of Christ is the way to live.

Where is your influence? What kind of influence is it? We shall answer to God regarding it whether we consider it great or small. Make it a good influence and God will bless you.

* * * * *

Samson's Sins

One of the evidences of the divine inspiration of the Bible is the impartial way the Scripture portrays the lives of characters, even the Biblical heroes. There is a record of the vices as well as the virtues; the successes as well as the failures. A characteristic of uninspired writers is to write with a distinct and noticeable bias either in favor of one they admire, or in disfavor of one they do not like. But the Holy Spirit chose to reveal certain things about people both pleasing and displeasing to God, as when He did He told it like it was.

Samson is considered a Biblical hero. From the days of youth, children who are brought up in homes where God and His Word are respected are taught the story of Samson. He was one of the judges of Israel. The record of some fifteen different judges is given us in the books of Judges and First Samuel, even though the account of some of them is very brief. But Samson filled a difficult role in a difficult time for Israel, and his work was unique among the Judges.

He was a power and strength for Israel, God's people, in a period of history that was noted for its faithlessness and fear. Israel had so many ups and downs during their history, especially during the Judges. The record of the Judges goes through cycles and repetitions of conditions depending upon the way the people at a given time reacted toward God. Samson was a leader during a time when the Philistines were harassing and overpowering the Israelites. We must mention that God allowed the enemies of Israel to persecute them when the Israelites would apostatize from God. This was God's way of bringing them to repentance and into His favor again.

A Hero

Samson was a hero in a number of encounters and conflicts with the disturbers of his people. He is known most for his great physical strength that he used against Israel's enemies. He was literally a one-man army. Whereas other judges had used few men at times, like Gideon and his three hundred man force, and others had used larger armies by which to bring deliverance to Israel, Samson relied on his own free-wheeling style and individual efforts without the aid of others.

But, in spite of his great physical strength, he was guilty of many sins. He became a victim of his own transgressions. Sin proved to be the undoing of this notable character. It is only that theme upon which we wish to concentrate because his sins are like the sins of so many of us living many centuries after Samson.

His Background

Look at Samson's background, home, and family. His parents are mentioned at various times in the record, and there are indications that he had a reasonably good home. The marriage of his parents was one of cooperation in the rearing of their son. Any home ought to be that way. It is unfortunate that such is not the case if every home. One of the gravest problems facing our great nation is that of marital strife and turmoil. The breaking up of marriages and homes and the disastrous influences and results that come from it are immeasurable. The lack of fidelity, the disunity,

instability, and dissolution of what God intended to remain solid is bringing dire consequences upon the land. Everywhere one reads and hears, experts that really do care for the teaching of God are being forced to realize that the failure of homes is one of the major causes of the crime, havoc, mental agony, abuse, and injury in the land. Homes are truly blessed when parents are united and cooperate.

Samson's parents were a prayerful people. They believed in God and knew the value of prayer unto God. Upon learning that they would become parents, they prayed. *"O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born."* We need to get the import and impact of that prayer. How wonderful it would be if every father and mother would pray a similar prayer on behalf of their efforts in rearing their children; Parents ought to pray fervently and regularly for their children. We need God's help, and God has provided us guidance. Too many just do not give God much heed. The devil has a hard job of disrupting children whose parents are concerned about bringing that child up in God's fashion.

There is a poem that should cause parents, especially fathers, to closely examine themselves regarding the impressions they make on their children.

"When father prays he doesn't
Use the words the preacher does.
There's different things for different days,
But mostly its for us.

I can't remember all of it,
I'm little yet, you see.
But one thing I cannot forget,
My father prays for me."

Does your child ever hear you pray, and for them? With the popular and worthy cliché around, "Have you hugged your child today," we might think of one that asks, "Have you prayed with and for your child today?"

Manoah and his wife wanted Samson to be reared according to the will of God. Judges 13:12, *"How shall we*

order the child, and how shall we do unto him?" Parents are taught, *"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it."* (Proverbs 22:6). Paul wrote, *"Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."* (Ephesians 6:4). They were not content to simply let Samson grow up. They tried to do right by him.

Was He Respectful?

But Samson broke the hearts of his parents. In spite of their good intentions and efforts, he disappointed them. It is one thing for parents to put forth the right effort on their part, but there is a responsibility that abides with children also to respect and honor their parents, being obedient to them. *"A wise son maketh a glad father; but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother."* (Proverbs 10:1). *"A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him."* (Proverbs 17:25). Some children go astray from their teaching because they bow before other influences that are contrary to their teaching. Samson seemed to have done this and it was his own decision. Proper teaching does not guarantee faithfulness in the child unless the child gives heed to what he is taught. When he does, he will remain faithful, even unto his old age. If he does not, what a tragedy and waste!

Self-Willed

What were the sins of Samson? He was self-willed and rebellious. He demonstrated disrespect for his parents in his choice of a wife. He chose a Philistine. *"Get her for me for she pleaseth me,"* was his instruction to his parents. They wanted him to be considerate of the law that God had given Israel long ago and take a wife from among his own nation. But he was headstrong, inconsiderate of parents, and God's will, short-sighted as to the result of such a marriage, and had to have his own way. Therefore, he disregarded the counsel, advice, and warnings of his parents.

There is the thought put forth by some that what Samson did with respect to wanting his wife from among the Philistines was God's idea in order to make an opening for him to get among the Philistines. There

may be some truth to this, but personally I think it stretches matters somewhat.

"A wise son heareth his father's instruction; but a scorner heareth not rebuke." "A fool despiseth his father's instruction; but he that regardeth reproof is prudent." "Hearken unto thy father that begat thee; and despise not thy mother when she is old." "The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it." (Proverbs 13:11; 15:5; 23:22; 30:17).

Like Solomon's son, Rehoboam, Samson gave no heed to the wise counsel he was given by older people. Like Saul, the first Israelite king, he was rebellious and disobedient to God. Samuel told Saul, *"For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry."* (First Samuel 15:23).

Bad Companions

Samson also chose evil companions. He selected the Philistines and a woman of Timnath, and later a harlot in Gaza, and eventually the deceiver, Delilah. It is a sad day when God's people prefer the association of those who belong to the devil. Something is wrong with such a person. *"Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men." "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. If they say, Come with us, let us wait for blood, let us lurk privily for the innocent without cause, let us swallow them up alive as the grave, and whole as those that go down into the pit; we shall find all precious substance, we shall fill our houses with spoil, cast in thy lot among us; let us all have one purse; My son, walk thou not in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path."* (Proverbs 4:14 1:10-15). Paul wrote, *"Evil companions corrupt good morals."* (First Corinthians 15:33, ASV). We become like those with whom we become involved. In the company of other apostles Peter was ready to die for Christ. In the company of the enemy as he warmed himself by their fire, he was capable of denying Him three times.

Dared the Devil

Samson courted and dared temptation and yielded to it. He dared trouble by giving a riddle to guests at his wedding. He dared trouble with repeated visits among the Philistines. He taunted regarding the source of his strength until he revealed his secret.

We are taught to pray, "*Lead us not into temptation,*" and to "*flee youthful lusts,*" as well as "*resist the devil.*" Yet, many are quite willing to give the devil unnecessary opportunities to mislead them. Then they wonder why they fell. When Joseph was tempted to sin, the Scripture records, "*He hearkened not unto her to lie by or to be with her.*" He immediately put distance between himself and temptation. While some temptation may not be avoided, it is folly to flirt with the possibility of sinning. It is no sin to be tempted, but it is a sin to yield to temptation. And it is contrary to every resolve we ought to have to deliberately dare the devil to make us fall.

Daniel resisted temptation by purposing in his heart he would not defile himself (Daniel 1:8). Vashti, when told to display herself before the eyes of a lustful, drunken company, refused. Many have lost their virtue and forfeited their souls because they were unable to resist temptations, even temptations they could have avoided.

Immoral

Samson was guilty of fornication. If we can believe what we read about our land, and believe what we hear being propagated far and wide, the nation of the United States overflows with fornicators. Samson went in to a harlot and violated a commandment of God. There are so many who are damning their souls, as well as destroying their bodies, self-respect, sense of morality, and the fibre of our country with similar conduct. Paul said that those who do such things "*shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*" (Galatians 5:19). John adds that they "*shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.*" (Revelation 21:8).

What About His Word?

Samson was disloyal to his vow, the Nazerite vow, which required that he drink no fruit of the vine, allow

no razor to his head, nor have contact with dead bodies. We have record of two violations, and knowing his character, why should we believe he kept any of his vow? Men who will not keep their word, keep their obligations, not even to God, cannot be expected to be counted as honorable, and can only expect to fall.

Christians have vowed faithfulness to the God of heaven through Christ. Unfaithfulness means our ruin. Are we better than Samson in keeping our vow?

It Was Costly

Consider what Samson's sins cost him. Sin pays, but such wages (Romans 6:23). There may be pleasure in sin for a season (Hebrews 11:15), but death, spiritual death, ultimately is the recompense (James 1:15). He sacrificed his strength, freedom, sight, self-respect, home, honor, life, and worst of all, favor before God. Was it worth it? It would like to hear the many people infected with the disease called Aids tell us if they now think their fornication, homosexuality, degenerate conduct was worth it? *"They are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous."* (Psalm 1:5,6).

We have this record so we may learn from it (Romans 15:4). Will we give heed, seek forgiveness of our sins, live loyally to God? Or will the deplorable example and regrettable story of Samson fall on deaf ears?

* * * * *

It may not bother you, and I hope it doesn't. One trying circumstance I have had to face is when other gospel preachers whom I deeply respect and love, who are my friends, and basically stand together doctrinally, fall out with each other. Never able to know all the situation, I find myself pulled apart. Usually the issues are matters of opinion, but not always. But I find myself losing friends from one side or the other, maybe both. Several instances like that have come my way. I wish it never would occur and they would be reconciled. How I wish they all could forgive and forget! JWB

Our Blessings

The word "bless" has several meanings in the Bible. Sometimes it refers to something God does for man's benefit. It can also refer to something that some good man can bestow upon another man. The word can also mean praise. Psalm 103:1, "*Bless the Lord, O my soul.*" It also means giving thanks. Matthew 26:26, "*And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body.*" First Corinthians 10:16, "*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?*" First Corinthians 11:24, "*And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take eat, this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.*"

Blessedness can refer to a state of happiness created from within. Matthew 5:1-12 gives us the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount. Those who are blessed are those who enjoy an inward peace which results from right thinking, right conduct, right relationship to God, and serving God and others.

Care and Concern

One of our greatest blessings is God's care and concern for us. Psalm 37:25, "*I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.*" Matthew 6:25-34 is a passage that emphasizes the providence of God for us. In view of this, complaining about life is to reveal the need of a more Christlike spirit. This is said, not to shame us as much as to provoke us to the attitude of gratitude.

The old song says, "*When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed, When you are discouraged thinking all is lost, Count your many blessings, name them one by one, And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.*"

Afflictions can be a blessing. James 1:2-4, "*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh*

patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing."

One of the surest cures for the "blues" is to see the problems that others have and compare them with your blessings of benefit. Other's problems do not make your problems any less, but it helps us keep things in perspective. So many have a very difficult life with tremendous hardships of various kinds. We will quickly overcome the depression we might experience regarding our own difficulties when we busy ourselves in ministering to the sick, weeping with those that weep, rendering helpful service to those who are less fortunate than we. And there are so many like that.

The Source of Blessings

The object of our praise and thanksgiving for our blessings is God. Psalm 103:1-5, *"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's."*

Psalm 107:1,2, *"O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy."*

James 1:17, *"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning."*

Philippians 4:6, *"Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."*

Israel, in times of prosperity, would forget God. The cry of the prophets was that they have forgotten the Lord their God. Only when they were punished for their apostasy would they realize the source of their blessings. The only time some ever address God is when they are

asking for something, but not to offer thanks for blessings received.

Blessings involve both receiving and giving. There is a need to share our blessings with others as well as receive blessings. The judgment scene of Matthew 25:1-46 shows the Lord's pleasure toward those that rendered service to others in need. First John 3:17, *"But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"* Matthew 10:8 speaks of the principle of receiving and giving blessings. *"Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils; freely ye have received; freely give."*

Good Examples

One blessing we can bestow upon others is the blessing of a good example and living in such fashion as to be a source of encouragement. One has said, "I had rather see a sermon than hear one." This is somewhat the idea of Matthew 5:16, *"Let your light so shine before men, that others may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."*

Barnabas was the kind of person who blessed those around him because he was a good man, a son of consolation and exhortation, a man who gave encouragement to others. We all can do that if we try.

Conditional and Unconditional

There are blessings that we receive that are conditional and others we receive unconditionally. An unconditional blessing is ours regardless of what we do or our attitude toward God. We have life, the laws and benefits of nature, the rain, sunshine, etc. by which we are blessed whether we be good or evil. Matthew 5:45, *"For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."*

Some blessings are conditional. All spiritual blessings, which are in Christ, are conditional (Ephesians 1:3). They can be ours only if we meet the conditions required to be *"in Christ."* Such are the blessings of forgiveness of

sins, fellowship with God, the right of prayer, the hope of heaven, etc. After citing several Christlike qualities that we are to develop as Christians, Peter wrote, *"For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall."* (Second Peter 1:8-10). The blessing is "in Christ."

First Chronicles 4:10, *"And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested."* Notice the kind of blessings for which Jabez asked. He prayed to be kept from evil. Jesus taught us to pray, *"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."* (Matthew 6:13). Our prayers should be akin to the words we read in Proverbs 30:8,9, *"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."*

Barriers to Blessings

We may not be blessed with as much as we could enjoy because we build barriers to blessings. We pollute our minds with evil and cannot see the good. Being overly critical, fault-finding, selfish, indifferent, having a don't-care attitude can dominate our hearts, and we fail to see and appreciate our blessings.

God has graced our world with wonders and scenes of beauty. There is much good in the world, even though at times there seems to be a scarcity, and the prevalence of evil dominates affairs. But we must not let the scars of sin and human depravity prevent us from seeing, enjoying, and rejoicing in the abundant blessings around us. Psalm 19:1, *"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork."* This is

still our Father's world and He will overrule to the benefit of His people.

Spiritual Blessings

Our greatest blessings are spiritual. We are grateful for family, friends, health, provisions, life, light, truth, etc. But Christ, the way of eternal salvation, the hope of glory, is man's greatest benefit. His life is an example for us to follow. His Word is a guide on our journey toward eternity. His atoning blood is provided for the cleansing of our sin-stained souls, and is God's means of our redemption. What a glorious opportunity is ours to be a Christian! Herein we have a purpose for living, a goal to reach, knowing from whence we came, why we are here, how to do while here, and where we are going. His resurrection promises us that there is life after this, and we can be in heaven with God and all the saved.

Our nation has a season called Thanksgiving. I am glad that this is characteristic of our land. Unfortunately, there seem to be fewer and fewer who give God the glory for the blessings we have, but even turn their energies in repudiation of God. But the Christian shows his gratitude the year round. The best way to say "thank you" is by living a righteous life along with our sincere words of thanks. We show gratitude by being a blessing to others. God told Abraham, "*Be thou a blessing.*" We can be a curse or a cure, a hindrance or a help, a problem or a provider of assistance. We prove ourselves by serving. Matthew 23:11, "*But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.*" Our Lord Jesus demonstrated this before us. May we follow in His steps.

* * * * *

If our mailing goes as planned, by the time you receive this booklet the year of 1993 will be drawing toward a close. We will have taken many steps along the pathway of life. Life will have ended for some who are vibrant and active even as this is written. It is a good effort we make when we pause a moment and take inventory of the life we are living. JWB

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True Obedience

While we hear false teaches preaching the false doctrine of salvation by grace alone, and that we contribute not one whit to our salvation, I still read in the Word of God of the necessity to obey the gospel. I still read of the authority of the Lord to make commands and the duty of mankind to obey them. Regardless of the clackers who denounce "rule keeping" and who falsely claim we teach we are

trying to earn our way to heaven by being obedient to God, the fact remains we must obey. Sorry liberal! It is that way. True obedience means submitting oneself to the will of the Lord from the heart (Romans 6:16-18), willingly, voluntarily, motivated by love, with understanding that we are to what the Lord commands for the reason the Lord states, and in no way looking upon it as meriting anything. We wonder why liberals like to misrepresent teaching they do not accept. Possibly it is easier than facing the truth. Nonetheless Christ is the author of salvation to them that obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). Try to get the heaven without it! JWB

The Last Word

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

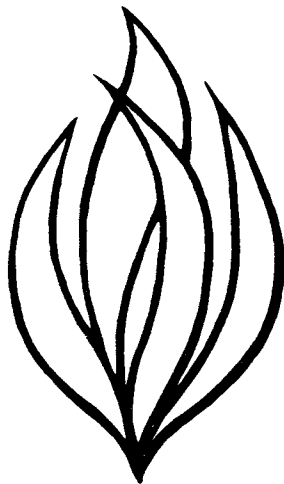
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A Burning Fire



*"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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Sara Katherine Boyd **BC**

The Modern Versions

"Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandment of the Lord your God which I command you." (Deuteronomy 4:2). "Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar. (Proverbs 30:6). "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." (Revelation 22:18,19).

These passages present convincing evidence that man is not to tamper with the Word of God. Those that do so place their salvation in danger as well as mislead others. To add to or take away from what God has said, in any way, is to violate these verses.

A Great Danger

In recent years many versions of the Bible have been produced and sold by the millions of copies. Foy E. Wallace, Jr. once said, "It is my firm conviction that the greatest immediate danger confronting the churches of Christ is the general acceptance of the pseudo-versions of the Bible." I share that concern and agree, not because this man or some other has said it, but because the evidence shows it to be true. It reflects a willingness to join forces with those who tamper with the Word of God, and also gives evidence of the willingness to accept false doctrines from books that would be rightly rejected if preached from pulpits. Gradually some of these false doctrines are finding their way into the pulpits, classrooms, etc. This lesson is intended to destroy confidence in the modern versions by giving the reasons why they are unreliable. I want the reader to know my position regarding them from the start, but I also hope the reader will be fair enough to investigate what is said before going ahead and accepting the modern versions.

Why They Are a Danger

First, when you are handling the Bible you are dealing with God's Word, which is religious authority. *"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."* (Second Timothy 3:16,17). This passage teaches the divine inspiration, infallibility, inerrancy, all-sufficiency, and authoritativeness of the Bible. Tampering with authority produces confusion. Rule changes always creates confusion. There was a time in religious discussions that one could usually appeal to the Bible to settle questions and disputes. True, some did not accept the Bible and you would have to prove the Bible to be God's Word. This is more and more necessary, and such evidence is abundant. But now you must prove "which Bible." These new books do not read alike. It is not that they simply are teaching the same thing in different words. They are teaching different doctrines, contradictory to themselves and each other. There are serious doctrinal differences within them, as we shall observe.

It is the work of the church to be the pillar and ground of the truth (First Timothy 1:15). But with these modern versions, one must ask "which truth?" *"Preach the word,"* Paul said, (Second Timothy 4:2). "Which word?"

Again, it is wrongly said that one can prove anything from the Bible. That is not true when one rightly divides the word of truth (Second Timothy 2:15). God does not contradict Himself. But with the multiplicity of new so-called versions that teach various things, that has almost become true.

It is my conviction that the rash of new versions is the result of a Satanic conspiracy to destroy confidence in the Bible by discrediting it in the eyes of people generally. Certainly that has been the fruit produced by the new versions. With the overflow of new versions has come a corresponding loss of respect for the inspiration, accuracy, and truthfulness of the Bible. Those who promote, produce, encourage, endorse the modern versions are guilty of promoting this conspiracy whether

they realize it or intend it or not. Pollute the spring and pollute the stream. This is the result.

We should not oppose a new version per se. But a version ought to translate, not mistranslate. It must not be a perversion, but a version. It cannot have fatal doctrinal errors in it by additions, subtractions, alterations, omissions, and presenting human commentary and paraphrase as if that was the Word of God.

Denominationalists have tried in vain to get their creed from the Bible and have been put to flight repeatedly because they could not. Now there are these new so-called versions called Bibles that include the creedal doctrines in the text. They have put their creed into their Bible. They have rewritten passages to do this. No man has that right and still call what he produces a Bible.

The modern versions render many great Bible aids for study useless. There is already such an appalling lack of knowledge of the Bible. But there will be more with the onrush of new versions. Try using a concordance, dictionary, lexicon, and other aids with these new things. They are useless. To be sure, in time, others will produce books compatible with the new versions.

Just Imagine a Class

Imagine a class coming together to study. They try to determine from the Bible when to eat the Lord's Supper. One book says the first day of the week, Another says Saturday night. Some even call the breaking of bread nothing more than a common meal, so even the Lord's Supper is taken out.

Study the nature of tongue-speaking. One says it refers to languages. Another says it is ecstatic utterances. Another says strange sounds. How can the student ever know?

Was Peter a pope? Some of the new versions call him the rock upon which the church was built.

What is the plan of salvation? Some teach correctly. Others teach salvation by faith only, which contradicts

itself and reliable Bibles. Did Isaiah prophesy a virgin would give birth to a child? Many of the modern versions have taken the word "*virgin*" out, and replaced it with two words, "young woman," or just a "girl." That is quite a difference.

In my early years of preaching I soon realized the detriment to study by the distorted footnotes often found in Catholic Bibles. The errors in those footnotes explained away God's truth. But now the errors are found in the text as if they were a part of God's Word. It is folly to contend such false doctrines are merely matters of human opinion. It is a matter of truth versus error. Those who hold to these new books are guilty of upholding false doctrines when they tell people such things are reliable versions of the Bible.

Attitudes of the Producers

Who is giving the public these books? For the most part, they are products of modernists, liberals, infidels, denominationalists that do not accept the truth regarding the nature of the inspiration of the Bible. One's attitude toward an object will determine how one treats that object. If I hold a stone in my hand thinking it is merely a piece of gravel, I will not treat it with the same respect I would if I understood it was a precious gem. Those producing these books do not look upon the Bible as the inspired word as taught in the Bible itself. Let us consider some of the attitudes various ones hold. All do not hold all these attitudes, but these things exist among them.

To them Christianity is an evolved, rather than a revealed religion. It has been taken from past religions and gradually developed. The Bible is an ancient document written from previously existing documents. The doctrine of the Deity of Christ gradually evolved. The first four books of the New Testament are merely human interpretations of Christ, and contain exaggerations. Matthew was not accurate. Paul was ever changing his mind. The writers are not even aware they were writing Scripture. Abraham is a myth, as was Jonah. Gideon is a legend. Justification is a religious experience of some kind. Paul only had second-hand

information and was inconsistent. There is no such thing as divine prophecy and fulfillment. We need a new religion for a new day. So it goes with the "translators."

They have translated according to their attitude toward Christ and the Bible. They have translated according to their theology. They have given their interpretation of the Bible and called it the Bible. They tell you what they think the writers probably meant to say, but not what they said.

In view of these attitudes toward the Bible, how could anybody be so naive as to think these new versions are not to be held suspect? It is just as sensible to put a fox in charge of the chickens as to put the Bible in their hands and expect a reliable version from them.

These statements have been general, but can be specifically proven. But space does not allow going into detail. But let us now turn our attention to a few of the more prominent new versions for specific examples of perversion and false doctrine.

Revised Standard Version

The RSV render the term "*virgin*" in Isaiah 7:14 as merely "young woman." The word "*almah*" does mean a young woman, but much more. It means an unmarried, young, chaste, marriageable young woman, or a virgin. We can know this is what Isaiah meant when he is quoted by another inspired writer, Matthew 1:22,23, who tells us the prophecy refers to the virgin birth of Jesus specifically. Why any person wants to join ranks with modernists to remove divinely given evidence of the Deity of Christ is beyond understanding. The birth Isaiah mentioned was to be a "*sign*," which referred to a miraculous event. There is nothing miraculous about a young woman bearing a child. But there is a miracle when a virgin bears a child, and not just a child, but specifically designated that the child would be a son. This perversion alone is enough to place the RSV suspect. We must remember that the man in charge of the Old Testament translation of the RSV was a militant, anti-Christian, Jewish rabbi who denies Jesus

is the Son of God. Why should we follow his perverted way? It is not scholarship to do so, but heresy.

Every mention of Jesus as the "*only begotten Son of God*" has been taken out of the RSV. Instead, the word "only" by itself is used. But Jesus is not the only Son of God. Adam was called a son of God, as were the people of ancient Israel, and Christians today. The term "*only begotten Son of God*" necessitates Deity of Christ. "Only" does not demand such.

Some have said the word "monogenes" (*only begotten*) ought to be "unique." But that says nothing about the Deity of Christ. We are all unique. But Jesus was unique because He is the divine Son of God.

The translators of the RSV made a deliberate decision to use the pronouns "thee, thou" with reference to Deity, and "you, yours" with reference to mere humanity. And what did they do to pronouns mentioning Jesus? Yes, they used only the human designation. Why? Because they do not believe in Jesus. And yet, some of those who say they do believe in Him adopt the false Bibles.

The RSV is the official Bible of the National Council of Churches, which ought open your eyes. There is no more heretical, anti-Christ, modernist organization in the world than that one. They admit the RSV was produced to further their cause, which is to render Christ nothing more than an exceptional man.

The RSV makes the "seed" of Abraham (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:16) his posterity, which could mean the nation of Israel. Paul said it referred to Christ specifically. The "seed" was "*one*."

RSV translators deny prophecy-fulfillment elements of the Bible. They leave out such passages as the last twelve verses of Mark sixteen that teach the Great Commission, the plan of salvation, the purpose of tongues. They omit the account of Jesus talking to the woman taken in adultery. They make Luke 1:34 read (as Mary is trying to understand how she could have a child), "How can this be, since I have no husband?" Sadly, many women without husbands have had children., But none have had

children without relations with a man. The passage should read, "*How can this be, seeing I know not a man?*" She had no relations with man, she being yet a virgin.

Why do the so-called "scholars" among us wish to join hands with those who deny the very foundation of Christianity, the Deity of Christ, and tell us that these books that time and time again remove evidences of that Deity are reliable Bibles and we ought uphold them? I have no confidence in the RSV, nor in those who uphold them, regardless who he is or how many arbitrarily determined theological and academic degrees he has. He upholds error, promoting fatal doctrines that cost souls.

The Living Bible

The LB is one of the most perverted books ever produced. It is called a paraphrase, meaning, putting the words of others into your own words. There is nothing wrong with making a paraphrase. But to call a paraphrase as the actual Word of God is a deliberate lie. Commentaries have their places, but no commentary is God's Word. People need to know what God said, not what some "scholar" thinks God might have meant to say if He had given it more thought. The LB is not even a reliable and profitable commentary. Yet, some uphold it and use it almost exclusively in studying the Bible.

The LB teaches premillennialism (Second Timothy 4:1; Isaiah 2:2-4), salvation by faith only (Romans 4:12; John 1:12). It takes out James 2:24 and the phrase "*not by faith only.*" It teaches salvation before baptism (First Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3). It teaches the direct operation of the Holy Spirit (John 3:8), and the false doctrine of inherited guilt of sin (Psalm 51:5; Ephesians 2:3). In places it has profanity (First Samuel 20:30). The errors of this book are so manifold that it would take more space than we can now afford to specify them all.

The producer of the LB is a Baptist, though many Baptists disclaim him and his book. He has totally removed the phrase "*churches of Christ*" from Romans 16:16, and changed it to read, "All the churches send you their greeting." One woman heard me preach these things and afterward said, "But it is so easy to read."

That may be true. The funny paper is easy to read, but it will not tell you the truth you need to know to go to heaven. Some want everything poured in and nothing to dig out. Easily read books make their danger all the more subtle, especially perverted as the LB is.

Bad News For Any Man

Good News For Modern Man is bad news because of the multiple doctrinal errors in it. It also teaches salvation by faith alone (Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:26). It makes Christ and Paul contradict each other regarding the removal of the Mosaic Law (Matthew 5:17,18; Ephesians 2:15), but nearly all the modern versions do the same thing. Christ said He did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it. These new books have Him saying He did not come to abolish it, but has Paul saying He did that very thing. They both cannot be right. Called the Today's English Version, it removes Galatians 5:4 and the phrase "*ye are fallen from grace,*" because the man who produced it does not believe you can. He changed the first day of the week to Saturday night, and the Lord's Supper to a common meal in Acts 20:7. Fifteen passages that refer to the blood of Christ have been changed to merely read the death of Christ. People can die many ways without shedding blood, but Christ's blood is that by which we are saved. What right does any man have to remove it when God places it there? Bear in mind, many deny the blood atonement. The TEV teaches the old law is still in effect. And there are brethren who would oppose the TEV and LB, but sing the praises of the RSV and others that teach doctrines just as false.

True of Others Also

The things said here are true in many ways and regarding other doctrines in the New English Bible, the New International Version (we presented a full lesson on the NIV previously), New American Standard Version, and many individually produced versions like Goodspeed's, Moffatt's, and on and on, with the possible exception of the New King James Version, far and away the superior among modern speech Bibles. There is not one of the so-called modern versions on the market today that does not pervert God's Word in some

fundamental fashion, and still people buy them, read them, use them, promote them, quote them, as if they were using truth. Even this is true among our brethren.

There is not a senior college or university operated by members of the churches of Christ to my knowledge that does not have one or more of its professors in Bible classes but who uphold one or more of these modern versions, and they do so with the approval of the administration. This is why I am confident that the Bible departments of "our" schools are probably the primary funnel through which modernism, liberalism, doctrinal errors, and digression is flowing into the Lord's church. While some consider this almost heresy to even suggest the schools are anything but reliable, the fact remains they are not. More and more pulpits and classrooms in congregations are ringing out with the new, uncertain, and downright false doctrines taught in the modern versions from which preachers and teachers are studying.

Frankly, I expect denominational heretics to latch on to these books. It suits their error. But brethren are following the way of the nations around them. Some are so liberal and so desire to be considered scholarly and intellectual that they are aping the infidel mouthing of atheists and modernists. Support for modern versions from a child of God is unbecoming and is a violation of the very truth God has given. But we have learned long ago that the "scholars" and most "school brethren" are more determined to go the way of so-called scholarship of those who deny Christ than to stay with truth. These books are poison. If you do not think so, you need to do some study and cease following wherever the professors and big name promoters lead you.

Reliable Bibles

When you read, study, preach, teach the King James Version, you have a reliable Bible, trustworthy, that teaches no doctrinal error, and will lead people to heaven. This is generally true of the American Standard Version, although the text is not on solid ground with Westcott-Hort. As said, the New King James Version is very good.

The criticism against the KJV is grossly exaggerated. It is charged with archaic and there be some. Of the 773,746 words, some 300 are archaic and obsolete, but not wrong. And it is a lot easier to give the meaning of an archaic word than to explain away false doctrines in the new versions. We rightly hold suspect those who want to discredit the book that will probably be the guide of more people entering heaven than any other version that has ever been produced. Shame on them!

Have! Know! Believe! Obey!

It is not enough to just have God's Word. We must know it, believe and obey it if we are to see God in His glory. The Word of Christ shall judge us (John 12:48), and His Word endureth forever (First Peter 1:25).

* * * * *

The Lord's Day

As Christians assemble on the first day of the week for worship, we are reminded that this day has become just another day off work for many people. It is used for pleasure, recreation, self-indulgence, games, sports, overtime pay, pursuit of hobbies, an extra day for a vacation trip, and such like. Little concern for things pertaining to God crosses the minds of many people.

Psalm 118:22-24, "The stone which the builders refused is become the headstone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."

This text is concerned with the day the Lord made, a day of praise because of salvation, a day noting the rejection of the Redeemer, but also a day noting His triumph and coronation as the head. Jesus Christ was refused by some but made head of the corner by the Father. The day of this Psalm is a day of rejoicing and gladness because of Christ.

We are familiar with special memorial days like the Fourth of July, a day of national celebration. In the Bible there were special days. In one sense everyday is a day that the Lord has made. But there have been days that were sacred days, and connected with sacred events. Without the event some of these days would have no special significance. But some events make some days distinctive.

The Sabbath Forever

The seventh day of the week was prominent under the old covenant or the Mosaic Law. God blessed and sanctified that day because on that day He ceased His creation. This setting aside of that day was not done at the cessation of creation but later, even after the deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:12-15), at Sinai (Nehemiah 9:13,14). If there was an observance of the seventh day as a holy day prior to that the divine record does not declare it. Deuteronomy 5:2,3 tells us this provision was not made with previous generations, but with Israel. Even when the covenant was made, it was for Israel only, not for all nations. Exodus 31:13-17 shows the seventh day a sign between God and Israel.

When one understands the three dispensations revealed in the Bible he can know when the Sabbath was enjoined and for how long. The covenant made with Israel through Moses was said to be forever, everlasting, and perpetual. What does this mean? Does this mean endless and without limit?

It is also said in Scripture that the burning of incense and burnt offerings was to be perpetual. But none would contend that these things are operative under the authority of Christ. Jonah was in the whale "*forever*" (Jonah 2:6). Possibly to Jonah it seemed it would never end, but we know he was there three days and nights. So these words do not necessarily mean endless and without limit. We must determine what they do mean.

There are times when these words mean endless, such as reference to eternal punishment. But they mean "the full time period assigned; full period under consideration." For Jonah, three days was the period under

consideration. As for the Sabbath, it would last and was to be observed *"throughout your generations,"* or just so long as Israel remained God's chosen people, which means until they as a nation fulfilled the purposes for which they were chosen.

Whenever the words forever, eternal, perpetual refer to events in time, the extent is limited to the period assigned. When they refer to events beyond time, outside the scope of time, after time is no more, they mean limitless and endless.

When Forever Ended

When and where did the nation of Israel end? When did Israel's *"forever"* cease? Both the Old and New Testaments tell us.

Amos 8:2, *"And he said, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A basket of summer fruit. Then said the Lord unto me, The end is come upon my people Israel; I will not again pass by them anymore."* Verse five has the question when this will be. Verse nine tell us, *"And it shall come to pass in that day that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day."* Was not this fulfilled in Matthew 27:45,46? *"Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"* The end of Israel is included in the Lord's statement, *"It is finished."*

Hosea 2:11, *"I will cause her mirth to cease, her feast days, her new moons, and her sabbaths, and all her solemn feasts."* Hear Paul in Colossians 2:14-16, *"Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross, and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days."*

Amos and Hosea said such things would cease. Matthew and Paul tells us when they ceased.

The observance of the Sabbath is a part of the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments. The entire decalogue belonged to the old covenant. We serve God under a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31). Hebrews 8:7-11 shows the faith of Christ to be the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy. The Sabbath law was never a moral law, but a ceremonial one. The other nine commandments all existed before the law of Moses and included in the new covenant of Christ. The Sabbath was peculiar to the Mosaic system.

Delivered From the Law

Romans 7:1-7 teaches that we are delivered from the law that includes, "*Thou shalt not covet,*" the tenth of the Ten Commandments. This shows the Ten Commandments are a part of the old law that has been fulfilled. We are not to covet, but because Christ teaches not to covet, not because of the Ten Commandments given through Moses.

To what day does the text in Psalm 118 refer? May we persuade the reader to turn and read Matthew 21:33-46. For the sake of space we ask the reader to do this now.

The application of the passage is that God let His vineyard in the Old Testament to Israel. They were unfaithful and unfruitful. God sent prophet after prophet unto them and they persecuted and killed them. Eventually, He sent His Son, and they killed Him also. Jesus applied the words of David to Himself (Verse 42). The hearers understood that Jesus spoke of their destruction as well as His death and eventual triumph.

When the Jews killed Christ it was also the death of the nation of Israel. It can never revive as God allowed it to exist in the Old Testament. The present day Israel is not a kingdom as was ancient Israel. With the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, all genealogies, so essential to the old Judaistic system, were destroyed. God took away fleshly Israel and Jesus established His spiritual kingdom, the church. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus ushered in the day of salvation, the day the Lord hath made.

The Significance of the Day

But can we separate the phrase, "*This is the day the Lord hath made,*" from the first day of the week? Because of the significance of events that occurred on the first day of the week, we must recognize there is a definite connection. Christ arose on the first day of the week. Pentecost came on the first day of the week. The Holy Spirit came upon the apostles on the first day of the week, and the kingdom began that day. The New Testament church assembled on that day (First Corinthians 16:1,2; Acts 20:7). Hence, the glory, significance, importance and specialness of the first day makes it easy to accept it as the Lord's Day. It is a day of praise, worship, rejoicing, gladness, because on that day the people of God commemorate Christ. Actually, we do not observe the day, but on that day we observe the memorial to the Christ.

There should be in the hearts of all brethren in the Lord a special awareness of the first day of the week that makes it distinctive from the other six days because of the reasons mentioned. We would affirm that the first day of the week is the Lord's Day, a day which the Lord hath made, because it is the day of observance of the salvation provided to mankind by and through Jesus the Christ, the Son of God.

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Reverence in Worship

Reverence is defined as awe, respect, recognition of dignity and authority. To hold in reverence is to consider something holy, sacred, honorable, and higher than oneself.

Psalm 111:9, "*He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant forever: holy and reverend is his name.*" This is the only time the word "*reverend*" appears in the Bible and it is not as a title of some denominational clergyman, but a description of God and how He is to be held in reverence.

The reverence that the early Jewish copyists of Scripture had is noteworthy. They were exceedingly careful to treat every word with respect. Especially was this true when they copied the name of God. Reverence is a quality and state of mind that finds expression in word and deed. We are commanded not to take God's name in vain. Nobody will use in a profane way a name he respects. When you hear one misusing the name of God, he is telling you he has no respect for God.

Hebrews 12:29,29, *"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear, for our God is a consuming fire."* Our duty is plain and the practice is essential.

What Reverence is Not

Because some have a confused concept of reverence, let us notice some things which are not to be classified as reverence. Flippancy, flightiness, indifference, scorn are certainly irreverent. Taking lightly that which should be considered seriously is not being reverent. Lacking discretion and discernment is not reverence. We live in a day of observable irreverence toward God. It seems the more irreverent the movies, songs, plays, etc. the better the "box-office." Blasphemy, mockery, joking about Deity, nicknames for Deity are all examples of the very opposite of reverence.

Nor are we to think that a long face, a sick look, folded hands, short steps, and put-on piety is reverence for which the Bible calls.

There is to be reverence in worship. John 4:24, *"God is a spirit and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."* To worship in spirit has to do with one's attitude, condition of heart, understanding, and motives. First Corinthians 11:29, *"For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself."* To worship worthily is not to think one is worthy. It has to do with the manner and behavior in worship, the quality of the heart, showing whether we are reverent or irreverent.

There are several causes for irreverence. It may be due to a failure to understand why we have assembled. We are commanded to assemble (Hebrews 10:25). It is not for mere association with others, for fellowship, to be entertained, or to proceed through certain habitual rituals without significance. We are not gathered to soothe the conscience or pay our dues. We have come in obedience to God to worship God. We are present to worship. Each is to worship.

About Worship

What does it mean to worship? Worship consist of acts of adoration. Acts are involved that spring from an attitude of reverence and respect. We are to worship according to the directions of Him whom we worship. We are to sing, give, pray, partake of the communion feast, and proclaim God's Word. These things are to be done with understanding, meaning, fervently, sincerely, from the heart, with the intent to praise.

You may have said or heard someone say, "I did not get much out of church today." It may be because we think too much about "coming to church" rather than coming to worship. It may be we have come just to get rather than to give the honor and glory we are to give. It may be because we were not participators but spectators. Each one must worship. Nobody can worship for somebody else. Participation will dispel a lack of interest, inattentiveness, and will contribute to reverence.

Acts of irreverence are easily noticed. Unnecessary talking during the worship service, passing notes about irrelevant matters, laughter, excessive loud talking upon entering the place of worship! While we do not have to pretend we are in a tomb, neither are we entering a sports arena before the kick-off. Noises with books, distractions! These are generally lessened as one sits toward the front. Children crying, parents choosing the place of worship as the place to administer a spanking! (I was teaching this one Sunday night and later a member told me that he uttered a silent prayer that his boy, usually a bit rowdy, would be good during the rest of that service especially. He was.) The up-and-down, in-and-out processions by both young and old are

distractions and lend themselves to creating irreverence, or disrupting reverence. Playing with the babies and rattling keys are noticed. Such things indicate that some are not keeping their mind on the solemnity of the occasion.

More Irreverence

These are also evidences of irreverence that are not as noticeable as those mentioned above. While we need not "dress fit to kill" each assembly, we can become too casual and even sloppy in our dress for worship. Our clothes do contribute to our state of mind. We are not saying we must wear fine and expensive clothes. But we are not going to a sporting event. We are not getting ready to work in the garden or mow the lawn. Worship is not a playground period. We should dress in keeping with the dignity of the occasion.

The failure to sing may show a disregard for this avenue of worship. To not follow in prayer, or let your mind think of irrelevant matters while considering God's Word are individual matters that only the individual will know and can control. Sleeping too late, staying out too late the evening before the day of worship, contributes to inattentiveness and drowsiness that does not reflect reverence. (There may be unavoidable exceptions that demand late hours.) Filling your mind with the newspapers, TV, funnies, etc. just before worship makes serious thought more difficult. Even our physical posture as we sit may indicate a lack of concern. When one is sloughed over, sleeping, lying back with his eyes closed, squirming, he reflects disinterest. We can add the habit of being late and rushing from the service as fast as possible as if you cannot get away soon enough. This shows a mark of something that ought not be. Some act as if "school is out" and they want no more of it than they feel they must do. Is this an attitude of reverence?

One of the more disgusting and sinful practices among some is rushing outside, even between Bible study and worship periods, for a smoke. Not only is this sinful and offensive to everyone who knows the truth, but it shows

that the smoker does not care about others nor the teaching of God.

And What of the Rest of the Day

Reverence for things holy might be indicated by the kinds of activities you plan for the remainder of the Lord's Day. Some make it simply another day for gain, hilarity, play, and selfish interests. Some, however, use it to visit family, friends, brethren, others who need attention. Some use it for needed rest and study. More subdued activity contributes to a reverent attitude on Lord's Day. With the rise of sports on Sunday, less and less are involved in matters that matter on Sunday. One preacher was heard to ask, "We get excited at ball games; why can't we get excited at church? The answer is simple. The two are not alike. One is a period of worship of the Almighty God in the special presence of Deity. The very purpose for being present is so different, and the activities are so different in meaning and tone. We come to honor God, not have a "blow-out."

Reverence for God extends beyond the worship hour. Whatever one does in life ought reflect respect for God. While everything we do is not properly called worship, everything we do is to be done to the glory of God . Worship is part of our service to God, but we serve God in many other ways also, including the manner of our daily life. Reverence is a living matter and one that occupies us as long as we live.

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Why Reject Premillennialism

What one believes does make a difference. It is important and has an effect in molding his attitude,

outlook on life, his hope, and his service to God and man.

We have been told that seventy per cent of so-called "Christians" believe the doctrine of premillennialism in some form or another. There are many variations to the doctrine and it is difficult to know them all and keep them separate. But there are certain points that are generally and basically acceptable to all premillennial theorists. We contend that any doctrine that is contrary to and derogatory of the truth is deserving of repudiation, and premillennialism is such a doctrine.

The theory makes the assertion that Christ came to establish His kingdom, but upon being rejected by the Jews, He postponed the kingdom, returned to heaven established the church instead as a temporary substitute. The theory continues with Jesus returning again for the saints, silently and suddenly raising the righteous into a "rapture," leaving the wicked here on earth in the "Tribulation" for seven years, then coming again at the end of this seven years with the saints. Then the Jews will be miraculously transported to Israel and converted, the temple will be rebuilt, Christ will then set up His kingdom and reign literally and actually on this earth for one thousand years with Jerusalem as His capital city.

At the end of the one thousand years the forces of good and evil shall engage in a physical warfare called the Battle of Armageddon at which time the wicked shall be banished into punishment and the righteous taken into heaven.

This theory is alternately called the future-kingdom theory, the one thousand year reign of Christ, and other such terms. I reject this doctrine as false, unbiblical, destructive, and wish to present a number of Biblical reasons why. While some have called the theory "harmless" because it deals with what may yet be, I shall show it is not harmless because it would uproot the truth, making the entire Scripture message suspect.

The Theory and the Kingdom

The theory means the the kingdom does not yet exist. Yet, those in the church at Colosse were in the kingdom (Colossians 1:13), as were those in Ephesus (Ephesians 2:19), as were those to whom John wrote in Revelation (Revelation 1:9). How could people be citizens in a kingdom that did not exist? Yet, they were "*in the kingdom.*"

The theory degrades the church by making it just an after-thought, a substitute, something different from the kingdom. Those in the church were said to be in the kingdom (Colossians 1:13; Revelation 1:9). Jesus used the terms interchangeably in Matthew 16:16-18. Jesus would not commune in the Lord's Supper again until in the kingdom (Luke 22:18). If that be true, and it is, the kingdom is not yet future because those in the Corinthian church were observing the Lord's Supper (First Corinthians 11:23ff). Why do premillennialists observe the Lord's Supper since they say the kingdom has not yet come? Matthew 18:3 teaches the converted are in the kingdom.

If the kingdom is not yet, then Paul's designation of Jesus as "*King of kings and Lord of lords*" (First Timothy 6:15) would be false. Acts 2 teaches that God has already raised up Jesus to sit on the throne of David, a spiritual throne. Jesus Christ is King over His kingdom now. He was to be a priest after the order of Melchizedek, who was king and priest at the same time. There cannot be any question but Christ is priest now (Hebrews 6:20; 9:24,25). He is both King and priest at the same time as was Melchizedek (Genesis 14:18).

The theory would make the Lord's kingdom an earthly kingdom even though Jesus said it was not of this world (John 18:36). His is a spiritual kingdom. Some looked for His kingdom to be an earthly kingdom when He came the first time. Some are still making the same kind of mistake as to the nature of His kingdom. Even though Paul was charged with treason for preaching another king than Caesar (Acts 17:7), the kind of king Paul preached was a spiritual king, not one that would rule and reign as an earthly king.

More Refutation of Scripture by the Theory

The theory makes the Lord's footstool His throne. Yet, Acts 7:29 teaches, "*Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool.*" The Lord's church or kingdom has no earthly headquarters. Its headquarters is where its Head is, which is in heaven, not Jerusalem.

The theory makes Christ a false prophet for Jesus said the kingdom would come in the lifetime of those to whom He was speaking (Mark 9:1). If it has not yet come, Jesus was wrong.

The theory makes John the Baptist a false prophet for John preached that the kingdom was "*at hand.*" If it has not even come yet, John was wrong. Such would also be true of the twelve apostles and the seventy sent forth to preach the same message.

The theory makes Daniel a false prophet. Daniel two tells of a dream of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon which Daniel interpreted to refer to four kingdom that would come, the first being Babylon. In the days of the fourth kingdom, which corresponds to the Roman empire, God would establish His kingdom (Daniel 2:44). If it did not come then, Daniel missed it and cannot be called a true prophet of God.

Furthermore, in Daniel seven Daniel pictures the Son of man coming to the Ancient of Days to receive a kingdom (Verses 13,14). This refers to the ascension of Christ (Acts 1:6-11) and is like the teaching of Jesus in Luke 19:12 when the "*nobleman went... to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.*" The kingdom was received BEFORE the return, not AFTER as the theory demands.

The theory makes more than one return of Christ and more than one resurrection. It asserts that He will come for the righteous and take them into the "rapture." Then He will come yet again for the third time to defeat all enemies and set up His kingdom. But the Bible teaches only one return. "*Martha saith unto him., I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.*" (John 11:24). Lazarus was righteous and if the theory were true, would be raised to "rapture," and that before the last day. But Jesus allowed her understanding of the resurrection to stand. "*Marvel not at this; for the hour is*

coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation.” (John 5:28,29). Both the good and the evil shall be raised the same hour.

Second Peter three teaches the world shall end when the Lord returns. But the theory has over a thousand years to continue after He comes. The truth of the matter regarding the kingdom is that Jesus is not going to “set up” His kingdom when He comes, but will “*deliver up*” the kingdom to the Father (First Corinthians 11:24).

The Theory and Salvation

The theory by-passes the plan of salvation for the Jews. It asserts an instantaneous, miraculous salvation of the Jews, as well as their miraculous transfer to the land of Canaan. This eliminates the need to preach the gospel to the Jews, even though Paul did and thought it necessary. It means they do not have to believe and obey as do the Gentiles. Paul and Peter taught that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34,35). They taught that both shall be saved the same way (Acts 15:9; Romans 3:20).

The system degrades the power and ability of God to fulfill His promises. Did God really make the promises of the coming of the kingdom and go back on these promises because the Jews rejected Christ? Paul said He did not (Romans 3:3). If He failed to carry out what He had prophesied once, do you suppose He might do it again at the next coming of Christ? Who else might reject Him and cause Him to change His mind? Could we really count on God to keep His Word if the theory be true? The establishment of the kingdom was not predicated on the acceptance of Jesus by Jews anyway.

What About Revelation Twenty?

Much is made by premillennialists of Revelation twenty where there is mention of a thousand years. But the book of Revelation is a highly figurative book, with various colored horses and riders, swords coming out of mouths, names written on the thighs of the Lord, the mark of the beast on foreheads, a key to a bottomless

pit, the binding of Satan, a spiritual creature, with a chain, the smiting of nations with a rod of iron, a dragon whose tail knocks out one third of the stars of heaven (some dragon if actually a dragon, and some tail), and souls, martyred souls, crying out from under an altar who were those who had been beheaded.

In the midst of this kind of symbolic and figurative language is the phrase about one thousand years, and yet, premillennialists insist that while everything else is figurative the one thousand years must be actual and literal. There is no sense whatever to that kind of misinterpretation.

Unfortunately for premillennialists, Revelation twenty omits some basic things necessary for the theory. It does not mention the bodily resurrection of anybody, the return of Christ, anybody's reign on earth, Jerusalem, nor does it even include people today. Rather it is a figurative picture of victory of the martyrs and the cause of Christ in spite of the persecution they endured.

The theory violates Biblical teaching that the Christian Age is the last age, "*the last days*." (Hebrews 1:1,2). The Bible teaches that Judaism has run its course and its purposes have been accomplished. See Colossians 2:14; Galatians 3:23-25; Ephesians 2:15; Matthew 5:17,18.

The theory makes Jeremiah a false prophet, and there is no way premillennialists can even respond to this next point, let alone reasonably set it aside. Jeremiah 22:30, reads, "*Thus saith the Lord, Write this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days; for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling anymore in Judah.*" The man under consideration was King Coniah, sometimes called Jehoiachin or Jeconiah. He was the next to the last king of Judah before Judah fell to Babylon and Nebuchadnezzar. The last king was Zedekiah. Coniah had no descendant to reign on the throne in Jerusalem, nor would he ever have a descendant to reign there. Significantly, Zedekiah was not his descendant because Zedekiah was his uncle. Also significantly, Coniah is listed in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:11. How can Jesus reign in Jerusalem and not make the prophecy of Jeremiah

false? Keep in mind, Jeremiah spoke the Word of the Lord. Maybe the prophet and the Lord were wrong and the premillennialists are right! Really!

The theory makes Paul's preaching regarding the way of victory for the Lord's kingdom to be false. Paul wrote, "*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds.*" (First Corinthians 10:4). We are in a spiritual warfare and our victory will be won through spiritual weapons and armaments (Ephesians 6) rather than through an actual, physical warfare of extermination of the wicked, as the premillennial theory dictates.

Premillennialism cannot be harmonized with Scripture. It contradicts so much that the Bible teaches clearly, and degrades so much that the Bible exalts. It is a wild, speculative, imaginary, sensational, mysterious theory that attempts to predict the future and turn the earth into heaven itself. It cannot be believed and believe the teaching of the Bible at the same. We must choose which it will be.

There are prominent people, such as Billy Graham, and a wide variety of Pentecostal doctors who loudly proclaim this theory in some fashion or another, and many listen to their invented theories and go off after these false teachers. This is not a minor matter, as some liberals in the church would like to have us think. It is a matter of the Deity of Christ, the accuracy and inspiration of the Scriptures, the integrity of the Word of God, and affects our very salvation. We cannot and will not bow before the ways of men regarding this false doctrine just like we cannot afford to adopt the false doctrines of men on any subject. To do so is to bring upon us God's wrath and our own condemnation.

* * * * *

**Listen cautiously to those who clamor for change.
What do they want to change? God's Word does not
change and we should not try to make it fit the
molds of the ever-changing ways of men!**

Sara Katherine Boyd



In the first hour of the day of October 27, 1993, a wonderful event occurred. Another darling granddaughter was born. The father is our son Bill, and the mother Lori, daughter of Jean and Clifford Reel. Sara joins a family of a sister, Rose, and two brothers, Cliff and John. We now have three granddaughters, and six grandsons. Our prayers will continue with Sara and her wonderful family who live in Lincoln, Nebraska. God ever bless them all.

* * * * *

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

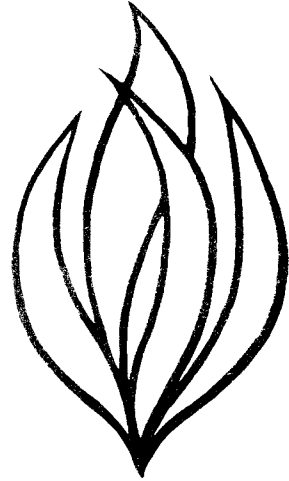
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A Burning Fire



*"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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What is Biblical Preaching?

Second Timothy 4:1,2, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom, Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine."

This is a subject that preachers must study, and it is essential for all to understand. We must have a Biblical concept of preaching. We need to know what to expect, what to support, how to recognize Biblical preaching, and what to oppose. We want to consider this matter from both a positive and negative point of view. We want to learn what Biblical preaching is, and what it is not.

Attitude Toward the Bible

The foundation of Biblical preaching is in one's attitude toward the Bible. This will determine how he uses the Bible and what he thinks of the authority of the Bible. The Bible is not man's commentary on God's Word. It is not man's subjective and existential interpretation of experience. It is not merely a record of traditionalism and ancient code of ethics. It is not just a philosophy among philosophies.

The Bible claims to be and is the infallible, verbally inspired, inerrant, authoritative, all-sufficient Word of God (Second Timothy 3:16,17). This can be proven from the evidence available to mankind to investigate. All parts are inspired of God. The Holy Spirit chose the words, without error, from the vocabularies of men chosen for the task of writing the Bible. Nothing more is needed and nothing less will suffice. It is God-breathed, hence, binding and authoritative. If there is any doubt or confusion about this point, there cannot be the Biblical preaching for which the Bible calls. This has become a problem because too many have become convinced that the Bible is no longer to be regarded as our pattern and guide. Such people are in gross error.

To preach means to deliver a sermon. It is a religious discourse to influence thought, will, emotion, and actions in the life of the hearer. The word "sermon" is from a Latin word meaning "stab, thrust." Thus, one is cut to the heart (acts 2:37; 5:33; 7:54) as the result of preaching. To preach is to proclaim with formality, gravity, authority, certainty, and finality. The preacher is a herald of a message that comes from a source higher and greater than himself. His message is from the King of kings. He is not permitted to proclaim a message of his own, but that which is from God.

An Abuse

The pulpit is no place to air personal doubts, but to preach the Word by which comes faith (Romans 10:17). Preaching is not intended to entertain, amuse, just occupy time, or make people "feel good." It is to "*speak as the oracles of God*" (First Peter 4:11). There is a difference between having something to say and having to say something. The preacher has something to say.

To evangelize (be an evangelist) is to emphasize a good message, the message of salvation from sin (Romans 10:15). Evangelism is a combination of the right message from the right man for the right purpose. The declaration of the Lord's Word is designed to save men from sin and produce an abundant life now and in eternity in heaven.

Much that is called preaching is not Biblical preaching. The pulpit is not the place, nor are the worship services the time for the discussion of mundane, earthly matters, current events, passing scenes, and opinions of men except as they relate to spiritual life. Secular speaking is not Biblical preaching. Many are good orators, actors, and entertaining speakers, but that is not Biblical preaching. The reason many people do not know the Bible, and are divided over the Bible, even refuse to conform to the Bible, is because too much of what they hear that is called preaching is not the presentation of the Bible. Often what they hear is a man-designed distortion of it.

"Sermons" that are nothing but book reports of current best sellers, travelogs, an analysis of the latest movies, the study of prominent people in the news, discussions of the arts, sociology, psychology, human philosophy, ecology, etc. are not Biblical sermons. The "sharing" of uninspired opinions rather than teaching inspired revelation is not Biblical preaching. "Sermons" that range from "Should the UN supervise a truce between nations?" to "Why is there a wildcat strike at Ford Motor Company?" have been presented to religious people in services where there should have been Biblical preaching. These subjects may have interest, and have their place, but such subjects are not Biblical. Such speakers are not gospel preachers, but current events commentators, theologians, religionists, possibly even moralists, but not preachers of the gospel of Christ.

Not Uncertain Sounds

Nor is the pulpit the place for expounding the speculative and fanciful theories regarding the future, the work of Deity, the return of Christ as if there were "signs of the times." Often preachers draw large crowds with such subjects, especially as they pretend to predict the future. But what ought be taught is that which has already been revealed in Scripture, and that alone. *"If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputing of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness; from which withdraw thyself."* (First Timothy 6:3-5).

More Abuse

The purpose of preaching is not to grind somebody's ax, as it were, and ride some hobby, vent some personal hang-ups, create sensationalism, display showmanship, or give a performance. The preacher ought not be on his personal ego trip, seeking praise for himself from his hearers. Often preachers mark themselves by gaudy dress, funny stories, humor for humor sake, personal bragging, personal testimonials, various oratorical

gymnastics that do not edify. Second Corinthians 5:5, *"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."*

When a presentation is completed, the question ought to be asked, "What truth was stressed?" Often it is difficult to determine. But one can remember that quite a show was given and the preacher was a crowd-pleaser. People left marvelling, not at truth, but at the preacher.

"We Would See Jesus"

We would persuade that Biblical preaching is preaching that fills the need, *"Sirs, we would see Jesus."* Biblical preaching is preaching that informs the hearer what God teaches.

There is also that which can be labeled as "spiritual sophistry." Closely akin thereto is subtle, deceptive argumentation, the battling against "straw men" and fake issues. There is sometimes preaching where there is more emphasis placed on manner than message content. Some are impressed with verbiage that is nothing more than techniques instead of truth. Many are impressed with the production of responses through emotionalism than genuine conversions through conviction to the truth. While there is a place for persuasion and exhortation, it should not be used as a substitute or even as a competitor to instruction and the creation of understanding.

Scripture Based

Biblical preaching is more than simply using a multitude of Scriptures and quoting passages. There must be explanation, application, presentation in context. It is not proper to get a subject, decide on the points to be made, then seek verses that will support what you have already determined to teach. That is getting the cart before the horse. Even the devil quoted Scripture.

One does not have to present numerous Scriptures to have a sound, solid Biblical message. Often long sermons

are properly preached from just a single verse, or a phrase, even a single word.

One great need of our time, as has been true in every generation, is that there be Biblical preaching. This is the most relevant and necessary kind of preaching. Romans 1:16, *"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."* James 1:21, *"Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls."* Too often people today are like those in the days of Amos. Amos 8:11, *"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord."* Why should there be a famine of the Word of God? It is because many who call themselves preachers are not preaching the Bible, but their creeds, manuals, disciplines, feelings, catechisms, theologies, philosophies, "think-sos," and other such trivia of no real importance. What little Bible that is preached is often twisted and wrested out of shape and context until the very message of God is missed completely.

Too many preachers are involved in everything on earth except learning the truth so they can teach the truth to others (Second Timothy 2:2). They get involved in community projects, running errands, trying to be "sparkplugs" for activity, promoting programs, being the church's public relations man, sponsoring bowling games, parties, golf tournaments, and trips to amusement parks. They lack study, lack preparation, lack comprehension of the truth, and are not offering much substance of spiritual nourishment for their congregations to eat and grow.

Resist Pew Pressure

Pew pressure is certainly a factor in the decline and void of Biblical preaching. The hearers do not want it because it cuts across their conduct. They will tolerate it only a short while. If a preacher persists in presenting what is needed rather than what is wanted, pew pressure brings

about his dismissal and replacement with a people-pleaser.

Amos 2:12, "*But ye gave the Nazarites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets, saying, Prophecy not.*" That means, "Don't preach to us!"

Amos 5:10, "*They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly.*" Amos 7:16, "*Now therefore hear thou the word of the Lord. Thou sayest, Prophecy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Isaac.*" Once a preacher was asked to teach the minor prophets and began with Amos. It was less than three weeks that the uproar against him was tremendous simply because he dared to bring out the attitudes people had against the preaching done by Amos. He never lasted to finish the study of Amos, let alone the minor prophets. People just did not want what was needed, and had no idea that the study of the minor prophets was such a condemnation of the same kind of people they were.

Isaiah 30:9,10, "*That this is a rebellious people, lying children, children that will not hear the law of the Lord, which say to seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits.*" And there be many who will accommodate such stuff as that.

After Paul had admonished Timothy to preach the Word, he added, "*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned aside unto fables.*" (Second Timothy 4:3,4).

Resist Economic Pressure

Economic pressure is a favorite weapon of the opponents of Biblical preaching. To elders, evil men will say, "Get rid of that preacher or we will withhold our contribution until you do." That gets the attention of weak elders. To the preacher, they will say, and often the elders are the ringleaders in this, "Either change your message or we will fire you." This is done alongside intimidations,

ignoring the Word preached and the truth presented, battling against it, doing everything except conforming to it. But any preacher worth his salt will resist the Satanic surge of economic pressure, and will never compromise one word of God's truth, regardless of the source of the pressure, the intensity of the opposition, or the personal consequences for standing faithful to the Word. He must respect the teaching, "*But the truth and sell it not.*" (Proverbs 23:23). Truth is not his, nor anyone else's to negotiate or barter away. It is his to preach. There might be more Biblical preaching if there were more preachers and hearers who were more concerned with the truth that is needed rather than the mushy nothings that are wanted. We should be mature enough to want what God says we need. That means we will rejoice in the "*whole counsel of God.*" (Acts 20:27).

It is a privilege to preach and a privilege to hear Biblical preaching. It is an awesome responsibility for both preacher and hearer. Since the Bible is the Word of God, when it is preached we are listening to God, obligated to obey what it teaches, and thereby we can be blessed. To reject it is to reject God and reap the dreadful and eternal fruits of spiritual destruction.

All these things being true, we must demand, support, and appreciate sound Biblical preaching. This we will not fail to do when we live the Bible as the Word of God which it claims to be. This will include our favorable response to what it teaches.

* * * * *

This is not a political statement.

It is all too apparent that some brethren think more of their political party than they the Word of God. We have never known a political party that was perfect. But we have never seen an administration as morally destitute of truth as this present one of Clinton. He entered the fray promoting homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle, making it easier to get baby murders (abortions), appointing to high office the most morally corrupt people one can imagine. Why in the name of all that is right do Christians support such servants of hell?

Jesus Answers the Question: “By What Authority?”

“And when he was come into the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority? And Jesus answered and said unto them, I will ask you one thing, which if ye will tell me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.” (Matthew 21:23-27).

There is an art in answering questions, knowing just what to say and how to say it in order to accomplish the most good. Jesus was often asked questions on a great variety of subjects, with different motives behind them, by friends and by foes. When He answered, His words had the ring of finality and authority.

Some resent having questions put to them regarding their convictions and why they believe and do what they believe and do. Christ generally welcomed questions because it most often opened for Him the door of opportunity to teach and emphasize some point of the truth of God. Peter wrote, “*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*” (First Peter 3:15). This is not always easy to do. It is very demanding of a person to keep himself prepared to answer questions. Most of us would probably do a better job on these occasions of questions if we had time to ponder the matter a while before we must give an answer. Staying ready is a difficult task.

What Was the Motive?

The question that was asked of Jesus in our text was not asked for information, but was motivated by the desire to trap Jesus in some way. Jesus had not been commissioned by the religious leaders of the Jews to teach. We might say, in the language of false religions today, He had not been "ordained" as minister by any religious order. Because of this there were those who sought to discredit Him and His message before His hearers. They wished to picture Him as a renegade and rebel that was acting outside the law and without authority to speak and act.

But Jesus knew their hearts and motives, and blunted their purposes. Rather than answering their question in the manner that they supposed He might, and in a way that would play into their evil hands, He asked them a question that put the spotlight of truth on them. He asked them about the baptism administered and taught by John the Baptist. Did John say and do according to the will of God or did he act by the direction of men?

They Dodged

The critics of Jesus had to dodge giving an answer. John had not been "ordained" by the religious leaders either, but the people properly recognized him as one sent from God. They knew his message was the message of God. The leaders had rejected both John and His message. Jesus asked them a question, the answer to which would give answer to their own question. Answer to one would be answer to both.

The way Jesus responded to these inquiries and critics reveals such remarkable wisdom. We are not always obligated to answer just any question in the way and manner some might desire. When we are asked we have the right to answer according to the truth and in a way that will advance the truth. We have no duty to give ammunition to the enemies of truth. We are not obligated to cooperate with the evil designs of people who ask questions just for the purpose of finding fault. By asking a question we can sometimes get a person to answer his own question. This is not the way to answer

every question, but sometimes it is the best way. When one is led to answer his own question, he is less inclined to reject the answer.

They Trapped Themselves

The priests and elders got themselves into a dilemma.. They had not thought the matter through before they asked their question. Either way they responded to what Jesus asked would leave them in a bad light. If they admitted the baptism of John was of God, Jesus would ask them why they had refused it. If they said John was of men, they were afraid of the people who considered John a prophet. They wanted to discredit Jesus before the people, not themselves. They feared alienating the very ones they were trying to influence and whose minds they were trying to prejudice against Jesus.

They even dug deeper into trouble when they answered, "*We know not.*" With that response, could they be considered competent judges of who was a true prophet and who was not? They admitted they did not know about John. They disqualified themselves to have even asked the question concerning the authority of Jesus. They had taken a position that was shown to be incompetent and fallacious. Jesus responded to their inquiry in such a way as to expose their error and inconsistency. This is often the more excellent way to give answer to some who ask some things.

Still a Good Tool

There are false doctrines being taught today that can be exposed as false by meeting them with another question. It is true that we may not always think of the best thing to say at the best time, however. Some doctrines are designed to offset God's word, release man from any obligation to God, and allow a person to do whatever he wishes. Let us consider some of these doctrines that can be met and refuted by asking another question.

Some say there is no objective truth. We ask, "Is that true?" If there is no objective truth, how can they know it is true that there is no objective truth? Some follow by saying there is nothing absolute. We ask, "Is that

absolutely true?" How can one be absolutely sure there is nothing absolutely sure? This disposes of that false doctrine by showing how it "shoots itself in the foot," so to speak.

One contends that you really cannot prove anything for sure. We ask, "Can you prove that?" If they can, they have disproven their assertion. If they cannot, they cannot know you cannot prove anything.

It is asserted that there is no absolute moral law, with do's and don't's. Therefore, we all must tolerate each other in our diversified society of morality and moral standards. But if there is no moral law that is superior and to which we must subscribe, why are we obligated to be tolerant of others? Why is tolerance any more authoritative and proper than intolerance, if there is no absolute moral law?

Shall We Dodge?

Some claim that a good teacher should only present a variety of views concerning matters and never take a position, leaving each one to take his own position as he sees fit. This is the way some teachers in the so-called "Christian" schools teach the Bible. They never conclude anything as truth. But we ask, "Is that your position that nobody who teaches ought to take a position?" Then why do they take a position when they denounce taking a position? Jesus took strong positions. Some would condemn Him for being dogmatic no doubt. But the same ones are very dogmatic that nobody ought to be dogmatic. Cannot we see the folly of attempted neutrality in these things and the weakness of doctrines that would destroy the truth?

Some have said that a real scholar cannot be committed to anything lest that prejudice his freedom to discover whatever he might discover. This is often said to scoff at the genuine scholarship of brethren if they hold firmly to certain truths. The idea that is attempted to be implanted is that if one holds strongly to a certain view then he is incapable of being unbiased. But we ask, "Why are you committed to not being committed?" Some like to disallow for others what they insist they be allowed to

have. When a point of view is self-contradictory, is not the fallacy of it obvious to us? Does not asking about such things expose the pseudo-scholars of the Bible? We contend that these errors are exposed by good questions.

Does It Matter?

Many believe that one belief is just as good as another. They declare that what one believes really does not matter very much. But we must ask, "If that is so, why is not our belief that what one believes does matter just as good as your belief that what one believes does not matter?" And why do those who say it does not matter try so hard to change our minds since we believe it does matter? This is a strange position that is held prominently in the denominational world, and in liberal digressives who have divided the Lord's church by their false doctrines. It is much like the doctrine that one church is just as good as another church, unless some church believes that it does matter to which church one belongs. Then another standard of exclusion is used to measure against such a church. Our experience has been that the denominationalists that say one church is as good as another do not believe it because they are jealous and zealous for their particular denomination over and above every other one, even preferring it to the Lord's church.

Can We Understand?

Roman Catholicism teaches that we cannot understand the Bible, but must rely upon the official interpretation by Roman priests to tell us what it means. What is so odd is that they will sometimes even quote the Bible to us, that which are supposed to be unable to understand, in order to convince us that we cannot understand it. Why do that if we cannot understand it? That doctrine is nothing but a transparent attempt to get people to remain ignorant of what God has said so the Roman doctrines will not be refuted.

About the same thing exists with Pentecostals, Calvinists, Mormons, etc. who claim one must have a direct operation of the Holy Spirit before he is spiritual enough to understand the Scriptures. Again, like

Catholics, they will even cite Scriptures that we supposedly cannot understand in order to convince us that we are incapable to understand them. If we had a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, we would not need their teaching anyway, but would have perfect understanding, and without anything they ever would say. We would not even need the Bible.

Why do some argue and debate against arguing and debating? Why do some preach that preaching is now outmoded and does no good? If all that is true, why do they do what they discount and cancel?

What if..."

Sometimes we encounter people who ask, "What happens to a person who dies on the way to being baptized?" We prefer to let such people answer their own question by asking them one. To those who believe that one must come to the mourner's bench to "pray through," we ask what will happen to such a one if he drops dead walking toward the bench? To those who believe in faith only, we would ask what happens to the man who is being taught and is almost convinced but dies before the session of teaching is completed and before he believes?

People will often ask "what if?" questions to attempt to get around what the Lord has commanded. But is it not clear that this "what if" question about baptism does not and will not apply to the person asking the question? He can never claim a right to crawl under that umbrella even if that umbrella existed. It is a transparent attempt to discount a command of Jesus. Why would anyone even want to do that anyway if they really believed in Christ? We can "what if" every command the Lord has ever given, but does that remove the command? By asking a pertinent question we can put to flight the folly of such questions.

His Authority

Back to the question asked of Jesus, "*By what authority doest thou these things?*" While on this occasion He responded in the most suitable manner the situation demanded, in other places of Scripture we have the

record how He answered that question directly and explicitly.

In Matthew 7:29, after His hearers heard Him preach, they knew by what authority He spoke and they recognized the authority of Him. *"For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."* The scribes knew the law by virtue of copying it over and over. But what they copied were the authoritative words of God, not words of authority of their own. But when Jesus spoke, He spoke with authority and was the source of that authority because He was Deity in the flesh.

In Matthew 9:1-8, Jesus forgave the sins of a man sick of the palsy. His enemies complained and accused Him of blasphemy inasmuch as only God could forgive sins. But Jesus proved His Deity by demonstrating His power and causing the man to arise and be whole. This showed conclusively His authority in what He said and did.

Matthew 28:18 Jesus said, *"All power (or authority) hath been given unto me in heaven and in earth."* The Bible leaves no doubt as to the divine authority Jesus Christ had and showed while on earth and certainly still possesses. Yes, Jesus answered the question in a way that taught the greatest truth at the moment, and even by that, implied His divine authority.

* * * * *

The Invitation

"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 your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30).

This wonderful statement of invitation was uttered by the Lord Jesus and expresses several inescapable implications that we need to understand concerning the Lord and our relationship with Him. First, let us get

something of the background against which this statement was made.

Earlier in this eleventh chapter John the Baptist had sent messengers to Jesus asking, "*Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?*" John was in prison at the time, being placed there by Herod because John dared to preach that God's marriage law was applicable to all people, whether children of God or not. (Many so-called preachers will not dare preach God's truth on this point because it would offend too many people. Their "love" will allow them to let the people go to hell rather than hear the truth. Some love!)

John was doubtless discouraged and he wanted to know more about Jesus. But could it not also have been the motive of John to send these messengers, not that John had doubts, but to enable these disciples, his messengers, to know first hand of the evidence that Jesus is the Christ? How convincing it would be for them!

Jesus sent him word, "*Go and show John again those things which ye see and hear; the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.*" This evidence of His power, authority, and mighty deeds would be convincing of the reality of His Deity.

Hear Jesus on John

Then Jesus discussed John the Baptist. What did the people expect to see in that man? John was not a reed shaken in the wind. He was not just an ordinary prophet. He was not one who lived in the finery of this world. Rather, John was the messenger that was sent before Christ as the prophets had foretold would come. There was none born of woman that was greater than John. John was a part of God's great scheme of redemption in that he was the herald of the Lord's provision for the salvation of man, Jesus, His Son.

Jesus rebuked His hearers, "*But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto the children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We*

have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came neither eating and drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold, a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of the publicans and sinners. But wisdom is justified of her children." (Matthew 11:16-19)

It really did not make any difference who was God's messenger or his manner of working, the people rejected them. John lived in the wilderness and was not a city dweller, and the people criticized him. Jesus walked among them in the cities as well, but they had harsh words of rejection concerning him also. The people were so hardened of heart and closed of mind that it made no difference how they were approached or by whom, they would not receive the truth. This was a stern and strong rebuke of that evil and adulterous generation. It was the message that they disliked, and no messenger of truth could have pleased them. How like those of yesteryear are many today toward the gospel and gospel preachers!

He Warned

He also warned the people of the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum that the day of judgment would be more tolerable for the ancient and wicked cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom than for them. Jesus said the people of those ancient cities would have repented if they had the equal opportunities to turn from their wickedness that Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum had. Mightier works had been done in those cities of the time of Jesus and yet, they still persisted in their wicked ways. Better evidence was presented to them, yet they continued in their rebellion and rejection of Jesus.

We have even better evidence now of what God says is right and wrong than did the cities of the time of Jesus or the more ancient ones He mentioned. But is there any evidence that the people of our nation are turning from their national degeneracy? We still ask, "God bless America? Why should He?"

Then Jesus thanked God that His truth had been revealed to those who were not blinded by their own wisdom and conceit, but, as it were, "*unto babes*," that is, unto those who were humble, teachable, willing to learn, desiring truth, and who would follow the truth. Even today, those who are so wise in their own eyes find no place for the wisdom of Jesus Christ in their lives. The colleges and universities of our land are running over with educated fools who are polluting the minds of their students with their degenerate and depraved rebellion against God and His will.

Against this background, where the stubbornness and sinfulness of the people was so glaringly evident, and their conduct so deserving of rebuke, in spite of all of that, Jesus manifests His love and concern by extending to them this noble and marvelous invitation of Matthew 11:28-30. Let us now turn our attention to at least four inescapable implications of this invitation.

Man Needs to Come to God

One, the very fact that Jesus invites shows that man is apart from God and needs to come to God. This is the reason behind the invitation and what makes it necessary. Man has separated himself from the Lord. What is it that produces this separation. "*Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; nor his ear heavy that he cannot hear, but your iniquities have separated between you and your God and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.*" (Isaiah 59:1,2). "*And you hath he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins, wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience, among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.*" (Ephesians 2:1-3). It is sin that alienates us from God. And this is something for which we are all accountable. "*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*" (Romans 3:23).

Jesus said that a man labors under a heavy burden. Sin is a burden that man cannot successfully carry in this life and into the next. Man needs relief and rest from that burden. Apart from God there is no rest to be found. The invitation to man to "come" indicates that man is separated from God because of man's own sins and man needs to come to God for the relief that he cannot obtain from any other source.

God Wants Man to Come

Two, God wants man to come to Him. This very thought is marvelous in itself. God would not invite man to come if He did not want man to come and if He did not want fellowship with man. God is certainly not insincere in extending this invitation. The fact that He offers it manifests His love, compassion, interest, and concern for doomed and damned sinful humanity.

Have you ever thought how God must feel when His invitation is rejected, having extended it only to be rebuffed? Surely, it must be offensive to Him. Even we know how disappointed we are when we sincerely offer an invitation to someone and they cannot accept it. But how hurt we are when we extend an invitation and it is deliberately rejected. Do you suppose God is pleased when we do such a thing with His invitation?

The church joins with Christ in extending this invitation. "*And the Spirit and the bride say Come.*" (Revelation 22:17). This church is the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5). Those in the church are also concerned for the welfare of the souls of others and rejoice when one accepts the invitation of the Lord.

Can anyone seriously doubt or question the Lord's desire for man to come to Him? "*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*" (John 15:13). Jesus even went a step beyond this, "*For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous men will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Much more then, being*

now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." (Romans 5:6-9).

Man Can Come to God

Third, the invitation shows that man can come to the Lord. It is possible for man to accept this invitation. God would not invite man if man was prohibited from accepting it. Some teach that some are predestined to salvation or condemnation and that there is nothing one can do about it one way or the other. They are locked in a fixed destiny, according to this false doctrine, without any choice on their part. The existence of the invitation of Christ is evidence that such a teaching is false. We are never taught to do something that we cannot do. It would be a cruel and heartless "god" to extend relief to those suffering under heavy burdens, knowing all the while they could not accept relief and because the "god" had already decreed their doom regardless of their need.

We cannot come to God because we deserve the right to come. We do not come because we earn or merit the privilege to come. If it was not for the love, grace, and mercy of God there would be no invitation whatsoever. Man would have to suffer the justice of his own transgressions from which he could not possibly redeem himself by himself. So we know that man can accept the Lord's invitation if he will. He has the power of choice and the ability to respond favorably.

Man is Told the Way

Fourth, God has graciously informed us, through His Word, that there is a way that exists that leads to Him. He has taught us what this way involves, and how we can come to Him in acceptance of His invitation. God draws us unto Him. *"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."* (John 6:44). But we ask, "How does God draw man unto Him?" Does God draw through some miraculous means, or by some direct operation of the Holy Spirit, by something better felt than told, or some mysterious experience? Certainly not! The very next verse (45) tells us how man is drawn by the Father. *"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." Who is it that comes? It is those that are drawn (verse 44). Again, who is it that comes? It is those that are taught, have heard, have learned (verse 45). Therefore, it is clear that God draws man to Him by man being taught and man learning the Word of God.

"For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." (Acts 2:39). God calls us. How does God call? *"Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."* (Second Thessalonian 2:14).

God provided Christ, His perfect life, His death, burial, and resurrection as the way of salvation (First Corinthians 15:1-4). This was and is God's plan. This is what Deity has done to make it possible for man to remove that barrier of sin that separates him from his Creator and Judge.

When God calls, He expects man to answer. He calls and we must call back to Him. *"And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved."* (Acts 2:21). The same is taught in Romans 10:13.

How do we call back in response to God's call? It is not just saying, "Lord, Lord ." (Matthew 7:21). It involves the doing of His will. *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven."* Peter told his hearers on Pentecost, *"Save yourselves from this untoward generation."* (Acts 2:40). He did not tell them to save themselves by themselves, for this they could not do. But he was emphasizing that they had a part in their own salvation and they must do whatever was required of them. Obedience is involved. *"Christ is the author of salvation to them that obey him."* (Hebrews 5:9).

The Process in Capsule Form

The process of salvation, and it is a process because there are several elements involved, is outlined in

Romans 10:13-17. *"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias (Isaiah) saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."*

Notice the steps involved. One must preach; the message must be heard; it must be believed; one must call on the name of the Lord; the result is salvation. Please notice that Paul did not contend for salvation at the point of belief, but only after calling on the name of the Lord. Paul placed something between belief and salvation that he specified as calling on the name of the Lord. Those who preach and believe salvation at the point of faith have an insurmountable problem harmonizing their contention with the inspired word of Paul. Since the apostle put something between faith and salvation, who is the man with authority to say that there is nothing between them?

What does it mean to call on the name of the Lord? Paul surely knew, being guided by the Holy Spirit, and since he was commanded to do exactly that. Acts 22:16, *"And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."* Here is that which a person does to call on the name of the Lord. He is baptized, just like Ananias told Saul (Paul) to do.

Again, First Peter 3:21, *"The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."* God calls. We answer. What is an answer but a response to the call? How do we answer? Baptism is answering the call of God. Having been called by the gospel, hearing the call, believing the call, and answering the call in obedience to the commands of the gospel, the burdens of sin are lifted from us. One assumes a lighter, easier burden, a responsibility and duty, but one which he can

carry, now having had the unbearable burden of sin taken from him. He is given rest from the burden of sin that condemns, and assumes his place alongside people of God with a load they can carry with God's help.

Called by the Gospel

Too many times people are taught that they are to wait for some special kind of call they feel must be a call from God, but a call that never comes except in their own imagination and of their own invention. We have already been called. What we need, what God has provided, what we are to do to answer God's call is revealed in the gospel.

Once when our youngest, Sam, was playing nearby where I was sitting, I called to him to come to me. I could not see him, but could tell how quiet he became as he stopped playing and yet, did not come. I called again, more forcefully, "Sam, come here to me." Still he did not come. The third time, more forceful than before, I called and this time he came running to me, explaining, "I'm sorry, Daddy, I did not hear you the first two times." Many of us are like Sam on that occasion. We have heard the call of God. We just have not answered.

The Master's invitation is the most serious proposition ever placed before the human mind. And let it be known that God has done all that God is going to do to call us. He has provided the Savior. He has provided the way to the Savior. He has taught us what that way involves. He has invited us to come that way. Now it is up to each one to come the way of the Lord's provision, or suffer the consequences of damnation of the lost because of rejection of the invitation.

Let it not be your situation that the invitation is rejected. Come to Christ today, and have your sins lifted from you forever. Such is our prayer that goes with this lesson to everyone who reads it.

But what are we commanded to do? Having heard the word, we are to believe in Christ as the Son of God (John 8:24). We must repent of our sins (Luke 13:3). We are to confess our faith in Christ as the Son of God (Romans

10:9,10; Luke 12:8,9), and baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 3:38; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6: 3,4).

* * * * *

TIME GOES BY EVER SO SWIFTLY:

This is hardly a revelation to any reader. It may have seemed as if time crept along when we were younger, but surely we are not so inclined to think as the years accumulate.

We began this venture of producing **A BURNING FIRE** in June 1982 while preaching for the East Main church in Tupelo, Mississippi. Little did we realize just what we were undertaking. We had no idea as to the amount to time, work, and expense this would ultimately demand. It is a good thing we did not because we may have been discouraged.

But I am so glad about what has been done. The next issue will complete fourteen volumes, each volume having twelve issues. We started out to produce one volume per year, but have gone a bit faster. As plans now stand, possibly three, maybe four, volumes remain. Time will tell what we can do.

But a point I want to make is this. Little did we realize when we started this work how rebellious our nation would become against the ways of God. We knew many were crying for the overthrow of everything good, but could we have even imagined how successful the enemies of decency and truth would be over the next decade? We now live in a land when in almost every arena there is the denunciation

of the truth of God. Our governmental leaders are probably the most vicious enemies of God's way that has ever occupied the power of government. The schools and universities are producing another generation of humanistic, heathenish barbarians without moral principles and fear of the Lord. Money, power, fame, and pleasure are the gods of America. The churches are saturated with insipid servants of Satan who dare not teach the truth as revealed in the Bible. They have gone after the ways of sin, accommodating sin, even condoning sin. The entertainment world is dominated by the most degenerate minds imaginable. Just consider what they produce and this cannot be denied. The written materials being splashed about all ring with defiance of God.

Even the Lord's church suffers under the rebellion of heretics, liberals, modernists, who have digressed from the truth to go along with the ways of the world. Colleges established by good men to help homes in educating their children in an environment where truth was respected have been perverted time and again into citadels of heresy.

Who could have imagined the deplorable conditions that now exist when we began this effort just eleven years ago. I did not foresee how depraved matters would become. Did you?

But I knew this, and still know. God's truth is the way, the only way, and no other way can or will save. I intend to be one who will walk that way, and teach that way. I hope you will too.!

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Avoid the Burden of Regret

We find few people who would deny that there are things in their past that they regret. It may be deeds, words, decisions of various kinds. We realize we cannot always do perfectly like we wish we could, and who does not know how much improved is hindsight over foresight? Some may allow regrets of the past to spoil their present and future. So we need to avoid regret all we can. This does not mean that from this day forward we will always make the best choices, say the best words, do the best deeds. But we can avoid regrets if we will do the best we can at the moment. It may not prove to be the best and things may not turn out the way we would prefer. But if we do the best we can with what we know each time, who can do better than that? If the future proves our efforts were not the best, at least we can be comforted in the knowledge that we did what we thought was best and can, like Paul, "*forget the things which are behind*" and press on toward the prize before us. We may not be pleased every time, but we will avoid regrets. JWB

The Last Word

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

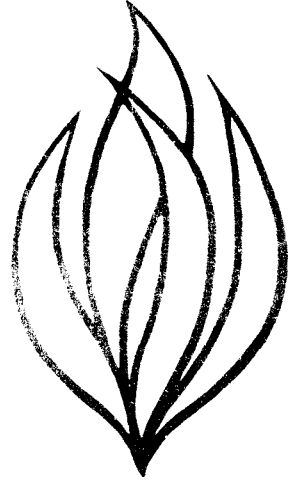
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A Burning Fire



*"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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The System of Salvation

There are some very sobering words found in the Bible. *"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy that he cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you."* (Isaiah 59:1,2).

What is sin? John tells us it is the transgression of the law (First John 3:4), meaning the law of God. It is a violation of the law of God under which we live and to which we are accountable and answerable unto Him. Furthermore, Paul writes, *"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:23). What difference does that make? *"The wages of sin is death..."* (Romans 6:23). This refers to spiritual death, separation from God and His favor.

Somewhat in contrast to these sentiments, and to offset the tragic results of sin, we read, *"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners..."* (First Timothy 1:15). It is evident that man is in sin and God wants to save him from its wages. It is equally evident that God intends to save man through His Son, Jesus Christ. How does God save through Christ?

Once a Mystery

When reading Ephesians 3:1-7, Paul informs us that *"by revelation he (God) made known unto me the mystery, (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby when ye hear, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit."* Please take note of the word *"mystery."* In the New Testament it refers to a battle plan, a scheme, a design by which something is to be accomplished. Here it refers to God's plan for redeeming man, His system of salvation through Jesus Christ. Once it was hidden, in the sense that it was not yet revealed and was unknown.

It was gradually unfolded as God designed it before the foundation of the world. But now it is revealed. Now it is no longer a mystery or unknown. As Colossians 1:26 reads, it "*hath been hid from ages and generations, but now is made manifest to his saints.*"

What is involved and included in God's system of salvation? As we begin our investigation, may we be impressed that if we are to be saved we must know and follow God's plan. It is not left to man to devise his own plan of salvation. The plan is God's and we must conform to it. So you can see that we are really concerned with the most important matter your mind can consider, whether we realize it or not.

System of Grace

Salvation is by a system of grace. Romans 3:24, "*Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*" 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.*" Titus 3:4-6, "*But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior.*" The Bible leaves no room for doubt but the plan of God for saving man is a plan that involves and includes the grace of God. But there are questions that must be considered, such as, how does God save by His grace, and when does God save by His grace?

First, we must understand what is meant by the grace of God. It has reference to an attitude and action of God on behalf of mankind. God has done something for us that we could never merit, could never earn, nor deserve. Instead of dealing with us in our sins according to justice, God has determined to offer man His mercy. As Psalm 103:110 reads, "*He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.*" How thankful we can be for this, because if justice had been the measure, none could be saved because none are righteous (Romans 3:10). Without the grace of God, we

could close the subject of salvation right here. There would be no salvation. •

But we are not saved by grace alone. No such statement or insinuation is to be found in Scripture to that conclusion. Just consider a moment. If salvation is by grace alone, and God wants all to be saved (Second Peter 3:9), and since the grace of God hath appeared unto all men, none would be lost. But who can read the Bible and conclude that all shall be saved? Furthermore, if any were lost, it would be God's fault. He would be a respecter of person to save some and not save others, the very thing Paul and Peter said was not the case (Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11; First Peter 1:17). If salvation is by grace alone and any were lost, would it be because God's grace was insufficient to save? Paul denied the inadequacy of the grace of God to save (Romans 5:20). If salvation was by grace alone, it would remove man's accountability to God and leave the matter entirely up to God.

Salvation is by grace, but not by grace alone, regardless of who says otherwise. There are other components in God's plan for saving man revealed in Scripture.

System of Blood

God's system to save is a system of blood. Christ tasted of death for every man (Hebrews 2:9). In the death of Christ where He shed His blood we see the manifestation, the demonstration of the grace of God. Ephesians 1:7, *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."* Jesus said He shed His blood *"for the remission of sins"* (Matthew 26:28). *"Without the shedding of blood there is no remission,"* (Hebrews 9:22). But the blood of animals would not suffice (Hebrews 10:4). It was *"by his own blood"* that He *"obtained eternal redemption for us."* (Hebrews 9:12). *"Being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him."* (Romans 5:9). In this way God commended His love toward us (Romans 5:8). Our reconciliation to God is accomplished by the death of Christ on the cross (Ephesians 2:16). As surely as salvation is by grace, it is also by blood. How shameful that some today are ashamed of the blood of Christ and are repulsed by the doctrine of salvation by blood. The

blood of Christ is the cleansing agent for our sin-stained souls. But as with all agents of cleansing, it must be applied. We must learn how and when the blood of Christ is applied.

Thus far it ought to be obvious that the love, mercy, and grace of God is such that by the sacrifice of Jesus, divine provision has been made for the salvation of man. The system of salvation is made possible by the unmerited favor of God toward sinful man and demonstrated by the death of Christ on the cross where His blood was shed. This is the role that Deity has done in saving man.

But man has his part to play in God's scheme for redeeming man. Peter preached Christ on Pentecost, informing his hearers of what God had done and what God expected them to do. He urged, "*Save yourselves.*" (Acts 2:40). He did not urge them to save themselves by themselves. That would have been contrary to what he had preached about what God had done. There is no salvation for man by himself. But there is man's part. In that great invitation that Jesus extended in Matthew 11:28-30 He commanded men to come, take, learn. There was that which Christ had done. There was that which man must do. Whatever it is that man must do, he must do it. Unless man does man's part of God's plan, he cannot be saved. Without what God has done there would be no man's part. But since God has provided the way, and designed man's part, man is expected to do what God commands.

System of Faith

Therefore, we see that the system of salvation is a system of faith. Romans 1:16, "*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.*" Note the need to believe. Jesus said as recorded in John 8:24, "*Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.*" John 3:16 stressed the essentiality of faith. In fact, without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). As surely as the system of salvation involves grace, love, mercy, and blood, it involves man's faith. We appropriate to ourselves the benefits of God's grace by faith. "*For by grace are ye saved through faith.*"

(Ephesians 2:8). We have access to God's grace by faith (Romans 5:2).

But what kind of faith? The Bible speaks of different kinds of faith. There is weak faith, strong faith, dead faith, and faith that works through love (Galatians 5:6). Jesus taught, *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 7:21). Can there be any doubt but man has something to do? Hebrews chapter eleven has been called the "Hall of Faith" because many Old Testament characters are held before us as examples of acceptable faith. Notice as you read that in each instance of that chapter the faith was an active, obedient faith. Mere mental assent to certain things was not sufficient faith. There is a faith that saves and a faith that will not save. Never does the Bible teach salvation by faith only. James 2:24 specifically teaches that one is not justified by faith only. We have seen we are justified by grace, love, mercy, and blood, and here were see we are justified by obedient faith, but not by faith only.

John 12:42,43 tells of some who believed on Jesus but would not confess Him. Their faith would not save. It took more than faith like that. Agrippa believed (Acts 26) but as far as the record shows, he was never saved. Faith only would have saved all of them if salvation is by faith only. The Bible makes plain that salvation is by faith. It is equally plain that salvation is not by faith only. There is no more misleading and deceptive doctrine, one that dominates the denominational agenda, than the doctrine that salvation is by faith alone.

System of Works

From James 2:20-24 we learn that we are justified by works. This may at first seem to contradict Ephesians 2:8,9 where we read that we are not saved by works. But inspired men do not contradict each other. Obviously the writers have different works in mind. There are works that will not save. But there are works in God's system of salvation that are essential to being saved. We must discern between the kinds of works.

We are not saved by works of our own righteousness (Titus 3:5). Nor are we saved by works wherein we can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9). Nor are we saved by works of the Mosaic Law (Romans 3:20,28; Galatians 2:16). But have we not learned how we are saved by faith? Let us also learn that Jesus called faith a work (John 6:29). It is a work of God. It is God's work in that God calls upon man to believe, but believing is something man does.

System of Obedience

There are works of obedience by which faith is made perfect, whole, complete (James 2:20-24,26). Works of obedience is what made the faith of Abraham an acceptable faith. Without his obedience his faith would have availed nothing. Romans is a book that emphasizes both grace and faith. Yet, at the start of the book (Romans 1:5), and at the close (Romans 16:26), Paul speaks of the obedience of faith. The faith that that saves is the faith that obeys. The works of obedience are the kind of works that makes faith a saving faith, without which we are not saved.

System of Law

What does one obey? One must obey God's law. The system of salvation includes law. Romans 8:2, "*For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ hath made me free from the law of sin and death.*" What is the law of sin and death? It is the law says, "You sin; you die." As Romans 6:23 teaches, "*The wages of sin is death.*" But we can be freed from that law, and this is necessary that we be freed because we all sin (Romans 3:23). There is a law by which we are freed. It is the law of God after the inward man (Romans 7:22). It is not a law of meritorious works, but the law of faith (Romans 3:27). James calls it the "*perfect law of liberty.*" (James 1:25). It is the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

Grace is not incompatible nor inconsistent with law. Neither is faith incompatible nor inconsistent with works of obedience. The system God devised and delivered involves all these things. The very fact that there is a system at all proves there is a law by which men can be saved.

In that law are commandments men must obey. Christ is the author of salvation to the obedient (Hebrews 5:9). Can we be friends of Him if we disobey (John 15:14)? Do not we show our love by our obedience (John 14:15)?

Keep in mind, even as man obeys he is not earning his way to heaven, nor attempting to do so. When we obey we are doing nothing more than what we ought to do (Luke 17:10). Salvation is a gift (Romans 6:23). But as with all gifts, there is a giver and a receiver. God gives, and man must receive the gift. We receive the gift by meeting the conditions stipulated in the law that God has given and made possible by His grace.

It is when we obey the law that we are saved by grace. It is when we obey the law that we enjoy the application of the blood. It is when we obey that our faith becomes a saving faith. It is by obedience that we are justified by works of obedience to the law of the gospel.

Summary

God's mystery, His plan, His Scheme, His system to save mankind is one of grace, love, mercy, blood, faith, law, and works of obedience. It is not one apart from the other, but each part with the others. One apart from the other will avail nothing. When man, in faith that comes from hearing the Word (Romans 10:17) obeys the law of Christ, God applies the saving blood to man's sin-stained soul, the merit of that blood of the Son of God having been graciously, mercifully, and lovingly provided, that man is saved from his past sins.

That law includes the command to hear the Word (Romans 10:17), believe in Christ (John 8:24), repent of sins (Luke 13:3), confess our faith in Christ (Romans 10:9,10), and to be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27).

Jesus said, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me."* John 14:6.

* * * * *

The Message of Galatians

Like all Scripture, this epistle originated in the mind of Deity, but was written by the apostle Paul approximately twenty-five years after Pentecost. Like other New Testament books, it dealt with existing and anticipated apostasy due to Judaizing teachers, teachers who were trying to lead both Jewish Christians and Gentiles to first accept certain parts of the law of Moses in order to be saved.

Galatians can be divided topically into three major sections: (1) Paul's defense of his apostleship and message, chapters one and two; (2) the emphasis on the gospel of Christ being of divine origin and how all are accountable to it rather than the law of Moses, chapter three, four and the first part of five; (3) exhortations and admonitions that pertain to daily Christian living, most of chapter five, and six.

The basic theme of the book is the discussion of three significant milestones in the revelation of God's plan for saving man, and their relationship to each other. These milestones are (1) God's promise to Abraham, (2) the law of Moses, (3) and the faith of Christ.

Our approach will be to consider the truths, specifics and principles, of the book as they are just as relevant and true for our time as they were for those to whom this epistle was originally written. Due to limited space specific references will be omitted, alluding to passages rather than providing lengthy quotations which can be read in your own Bible.

Defense of Apostleship

To Paul's amazement, the Galatians churches were defecting from their former faithfulness. He marvelled at their removal. Their drift was due to the influence of a perverted message, (1:6,7). God's curse rests upon any who would teach other than apostolic revelation, (1:8,9).

Paul defended his apostleship and message with several points. He was not an apostle of man, but of Christ. He affirmed that what He preached was not of man, not of human origin, but from the divine revelation, (1:10,11). He cited his earlier life as a persecutor, but also his subsequent call to preach Christ, (Chapters 1,2). He was not guided by notables of Jerusalem, and they added nothing to him, (2:6). In fact, there had been a confrontation between Paul and Peter related to the very issues that troubled the churches in Galatia, (2:11ff). Whereas Peter had withdrawn himself from Gentile brethren, Paul showed the way of justification to be, not the Mosaic law, but the faith of Christ.

The Promise, The Law, The Faith

Turning to the basic theme of the book, Paul noted how God, centuries earlier, had made a covenant with Abraham. In that covenant was the promise, "*In thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed.*" (Genesis 22:18). The covenant was confirmed, (3:17). The law of Moses, coming four hundred thirty years later, was not the fulfillment of that promise and did not annul that promise, (3:17).

The law had various purposes, being added because of sins, to bring Israel to the coming of Christ, to serve as a temporary guide for Israel until faith came. It was not against God's promise to Abraham, nor the accomplishment of it. The law defined sin, condemned sin, warned against sin, but did not contain the revelation of the way of forgiveness of sin.

The "*seed*" promise was specifically fulfilled in Christ, who is identified as the "*seed*," (3:16). Therefore, people are justified before God by the faith of Christ and not by the law of Moses.

Paul showed the end of the law and the folly of returning to it with other explanations. He cited an heir apparent, being a child, is as a servant, but later an heir in reality, (chapter 4). As a child he is kept under restraint and custody until maturity. Such was the case with Israel under the law. But when the fullness of time was come,

they were no longer under the law, but were redeemed and became sons, receiving inheritance.

Paul also appealed to various Old Testament teachings how that those under the law were under a curse (Deuteronomy); that the just shall live by faith (Habbakuk); that redemption was through Christ who became a curse on behalf of all (Deuteronomy).

He cited the historical event regarding Hagar and Ishmael on the one hand and Sarah and Isaac on the other as a type of that faith which was to come. Hagar and Ishmael represented the Mosaic system. Sarah, a freewoman, and Isaac represented the faith of Christ. As Hagar and her son were cast out in deference to Sarah and her son of promise, so the old Mosaic system was cast out in deference to the faith of Christ. That was actually the fulfillment of the promise regarding the seed of Abraham, (4:30). Christians are the children of the freewoman, the faith of Christ, (4:31).

With these, and other personal persuasions, Paul sought to prevent his brethren from further hindrance and apostasy being caused by false teachers, attempting to lead them back to a renewed faithfulness through the restoration of any who had been overtaken.

Living as a Christian

Assuming a restorative reaction and result of his efforts, Paul gave instruction on matters of practical living in a Christ-like fashion. He warned against the works of the flesh, (5:19ff). He emphasized the unimpeachable law of sowing and reaping, (6:7,8). He included encouragements to steadfastness in positive Christian conduct along with a closing that contained a prayerful attitude for the spiritual welfare of the brethren in the Galatians churches. Galatians, alongside Romans and Hebrews, shows the way of Christ being superior to and the culmination of all that which had been given and gone before Him.

Saving Faith

Let us now turn our attention to some specific truths and principles. Galatians teaches us the nature of saving faith. The faith that saves is the faith like that of Abraham, (3:6,9). But it is not by faith only, but by a system of faith that includes obedience. Galatians 3:26,27, *"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."* Notice, *"ye are..."* because *"ye have been."* Unless you have been, you are not. One must be baptized to be in Christ. This act of obedience must accompany faith for it to be a saving faith.

Prophecy/Fulfillment

Galatians refutes the modernists in their denial of prophecy and fulfillment. Galatians underscores the unity of the Bible, that is, the unbreakable link and chain that runs from Genesis to Revelation. Miraculous prophecy and its fulfillment stand as irrefutable evidence of divine inspiration of the Scriptures. Repeatedly Paul called out Old Testament reference to support New Testament conclusions, (3:8). One must deny the entire book of Galatians if he denies the miraculous prophecy and fulfillment element of the Bible.

An Essential

Galatians shows the necessity of *"rightly dividing the word."* We cannot understand the scheme of redemption without knowledge of the relationship between the covenant with Abraham, the law of Moses, and the faith of Christ. It is not an overstatement to say that most of the religious world that calls itself "Christian" either does not understand or just repudiates these relationships, and have mixed and confused them into a combination of Judaistic Christianity that almost defies explanation. This confusion is at the heart of much of the denominational chaos that has caused so much religious division.

Sufficiency of the Faith

From Paul's defense of his apostleship and message we see the affirmations of the inspiration and all-sufficiency of the Scriptures, (1:8,9,11,12), and the

sufficiency of "*the faith*," (3:25). This epistle destroys the claims of latter-day revelation, invented because so many are simply discontent to accept God's Word, and prefer something different. In view of the teaching in this book, we can see the wisdom and correctness of the motto to "speak where the Bible speaks; and be silent where the Bible is silent." God's condemnation rests upon those who would do otherwise.

Verbal Inspiration

Galatians gives us a clear illustration of how some are tampering with the word of God through so-called modern versions. The Revised Standard Version changed the singular word "*seed*" to the plural word "*descendants*" in Galatians 22:18. The RSV changed the word "*seed*" in Galatians 3:16 to the ambiguous word "*posterity*," which might mean one or many. Inasmuch as the prophecy has been changed to include many, they intended "*posterity*" to refer to many. But Paul was making his inspired argument based on the singular number of the word "*seed*." He said the "*seed*" meant Christ, not Israel, or many descendants of Abraham. Of course, the "translators" of the RSV, which has been upheld in nearly every one of "our" colleges, do not believe in prophecy and fulfillment, and do not believe Jesus Christ is the promised "*seed*" of Abraham. So they just muddled it up and, if they are right, these passages have lost any significance regarding Christ. If they are right, one wonders why Paul even mentioned it.

The Living Bible and Today's English Version have removed the phrase in Galatians 5:4, "*Ye are fallen from grace*." Neither of the producers of these new books believe one can fall from grace. Is it so hard to see why they took the liberty to pervert the Word and accommodate their dogma?

It is tragic, inconsistent, inexcusable, and reprehensible that anyone would promote, endorse, and present as reliable Bibles such perversions of the truth of God as is done by such "translations" as the LB, TEV, RSV, NIV, etc. Some have done so ignorantly, because they were simply parroting the "professors." But some have done so knowingly, and either do not care what the truth is,

or are among that number that wants to rearrange and redefine truth according to liberalism and modernism. In either case, it is a sorry situation. Brethren ought know and do better than to follow such people.

The Scriptures are verbally inspired (First Corinthians 2:12-14) and Galatians shows how important a word can be in the revelation of God's will. Let us not be guilty of tampering with it.

Regarding Apostasy

Galatians stands as an insurmountable obstacle to the denominational dogma that one cannot fall and cannot apostatize. The necessity of faithfulness is emphasized throughout the epistle along with warnings against falling. In fact, to prevent apostasy is one of the major themes and purpose of the book.

Universal Offer

Another message of Galatians is that the gospel is for all. There is to be unity in Christ. The blessings of God can belong to anyone who will conform to His will, whether Jew, Gentile, bond, free, male, female. God is no respecter of persons in Galatians as He proved when Peter went to the house of Cornelius , (3:28).

Galatians refutes the modernist claim that Peter preached one gospel and Paul preached another. They preached the same gospel, having received it from the same source, (2:7-9). One worked primarily with Jews while the other went among both Jews and Gentiles, neither to the exclusion of any. The very confrontation between Peter and Paul is evidence they had preached the same truth or else there would be no cause for Paul's rebuke of Peter's inconsistency and error in turning from the Gentiles, (2:18).

General Matters

Galatians deals with such relevant and living issues as worldliness, freedom in Christ, benevolence, responsibility, mutual assistance, individual accounting. All of these matters are treated in this book.

Finally, the action of Paul regarding his confrontation with Peter shows the necessity of putting the teaching of truth before persons, even persons of importance, (2:6,11,14). It seems that some people today have their "untouchables" in which they have a vested interest, whether it is some man, paper, school, project, program, etc. When things go astray from the truth regarding that vested interest, because of that interest, and especially if some men of prominence are involved in that interest and error, the defense of the truth goes lacking, is allowed to be overshadowed by a defense of those involved in error, and the exposure of wrong is left undone. Many times, if anyone attempts to deal with it, that person, not the one in error, becomes the "villain," and the ones in error are protected. Just why that is so often the case among some churches of Christ is bewildering, but it is nonetheless a sad record whenever it is the case. Love for men should never be allowed to provoke a compromise with the truth. In fact, the best way to demonstrate love for brethren is to always put the teaching of truth foremost before everything and everybody. Who is willing to do that? Are you?

The epistle of Paul to the churches of Galatia is an inspired revelation of basic fundamental information necessary to the understanding that the system of salvation is through Christ. In it we see the unfolding of God's eternal purpose and the coming forward of His scheme of redemption. We have the assurance of the correctness of what we read in the Scriptures. We have direction given us by which we can attain our fondest aspiration, an eternal home in heaven. We have God's answer to many problems and issues raised in and out of the church even in our own day. We have a manifestation of God's love and concern for man in that God has provided us His truth that we might walk therein.

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A real test of loyalty to the Lord comes when you have to decide between truth on the one hand, friends, family, fame, and fortune on the other.

The Jordan River

Matthew 3:1-6, "In those days came John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. And the same John had his raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey. Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins."

Matthew 3:13-17, "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbade him saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him; And low a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

One of the most famous rivers in the world is the Jordan River in the Palestine area. It is not renowned because of its length. It is only about one hundred miles long by air; two hundred miles actually. It does not come close to the measure of many other rivers in length. Jordan is never a river known for its commercial activity. There are fertile lands on either side of it because it overflows its banks and irrigates the land. But one thinks more of the Nile River in Egypt, or others, when that quality is considered. There are no great cities on the Jordan River. It is not worshipped as a god like many rivers in pagan lands.

Its Fame

Then why is the Jordan so famous? Though it has some distinctive characteristics that make it interesting to study, it is famous because of events connected with it. Especially is it special in the minds of believers because of these events.

Other rivers flow their course and proceed with a gradual descent, reach sea level, and come to rest. Jordan begins in the icy springs and melting snows of Mt. Hermon, just a few feet above sea level. It flows through the small waters of Merom which are very shallow. Ten more miles it enters the Sea of Galilee, which is twelve miles long. Many events connected with the life of Christ involved that sea. Now the river comes to about six hundred feet below sea level, coils southward through the Jordan Valley which is bounded by mountains and wilderness. It eventually reaches some thirteen hundred feet below sea level and empties into the Dead Sea and the lowest land on earth. The Dead Sea is the lowest body of water.

Moses and Jordan

The historical events connected with Jordan have given it its fame. Moses brought Israel from Egypt to the deep valley on the eastern side of Jordan just north of the entrance of the river into the Dead Sea, the plain of Moab (Deuteronomy 32:48-52). On Mt. Nebo, the peak of Pisgah, Moses looked over the Jordan into the land of milk and honey, and he could see the Jordan winding through the wilderness. There Moses died and God buried him.

Joshua and the Jordan

Joshua commanded Israel to come to the banks of Jordan (Joshua 1:11). The river was overflowing its banks at the time, with rapid current, steep banks, swollen over the valley (Joshua 3:15). In some places where the ravines were deep the measure has been one hundred feet. The current has been measured at times as much as forty miles per hour. In spite of the obvious hazards involved, Israel obeyed Joshua's command to follow the priests into the water. God cut off the water from the north as it flowed to the south and the people

passed over on dry land. Once across, the river's flow was renewed. Do you believe it? I certainly do. It was a miracle of God, a supernatural event revealed in inspired writing.

If God created the heaven and earth, could bring the flood in the days of Noah, parted the Red Sea, surely He would not stumble at the Jordan River. The purpose of this miracle was four-fold. (1) It gave Israel access into Canaan. (2) It destroyed the spirit of the Canaanites. (3) It established Joshua before the people (Joshua 3:7). (4) It demonstrated the power of God.

The Israelites settled the land and many years passed with the river figuring in the history of Israel during the period of the Judges, the United Kingdom, the Divided Kingdoms, to the time of Ahab, king of Northern Israel. Ahab had led the people into idolatry, with the aid and probably urging of his wife, Jezebel. Baal worship was in vogue. God's prophets were being imprisoned, exiled, or murdered. Then came Elijah upon the scene. Elijah had additional association with the young prophet Elisha.

Elijah and the Jordan

When the mantle was to be passed from Elijah to Elisha these two prophets walked to the Jordan Valley and to the river, at the very area where Moses had viewed the land and where Joshua had cross into Canaan. Elijah took his mantle and smote the waters of Jordan and they opened for Elijah and Elisha to pass. A whirlwind and horses with a chariot of fire took Elijah, and his mantle fell to Elisha. Elisha, upon his return, took that same mantle and again smote the Jordan River and it parted for him to cross and return to his work before the people.

Others and Jordan

There are many other Biblical records of interest pertaining to the Jordan. It had to be crossed by Abraham and Jacob as they made their journeys. Naaman dipped himself into it seven times to be cleansed of his leprosy at God's command. It was once the scene of a near civil war between the tribes of Israel

early in their history. Around it Gideon scored many military victories for Israel. Many of the armies of God's people were familiar with it, its fords, its barriers, etc.

Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, prophesied in Malachi 4:5,6, "*Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord; and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.*" The New Testament reveals that this "Elijah" was John the Baptist, who came in the spirit and power of Elijah (Luke 1:17). He began his ministry and mighty work as the forerunner of the Messiah on the banks of the Jordan, baptizing in that river that had already seen so many notable events in God's plan and dealing with man.

Jesus and the Jordan

One day another young and unpretentious man came his way. He came to be baptized of John. On that day even heaven broke its silence and we hear God's own confession that Jesus is His Son. On the banks of the same river over which Moses viewed the promised land, that Joshua and Israel had crossed at floodstage, that had been opened before the ancient prophets, there was this scene of preparatory work for the coming of the Savior of man. God, Himself, announced the identity of Jesus as His Son. Surely, this was a moment of crowning glory associated with the Jordan.

The Symbol of Jordan

Jordan's fame also has a certain connection in the mind of the Christian. We sing that great hymn, "On Jordan's stormy banks I stand." In that song the Jordan River symbolizes the death we all face. The grand thought is that of standing at the water's edge of the river of death that separates us from the eternal and heavenly home that God has provided for the redeemed. As Israel had wandered many years, and the promised land had come into view, with Joshua as their leader, they only needed to cross the dark waters of this great river to reach their goal and the promised land.

So it is with the saved in Christ. Having spent our sojourn in this life, marching on with hope and assurance of heaven, with Christ as our leader, we need only to cross the dark waters of death (followed by the resurrection and judgment) to reach that lasting and blessed existence with God.

Great is the fame and significance of the Jordan. Greater still, and comforting to our Spirits, is the hope in Christ as we approach the Jordan of death with Christ. As with Israel, so are we dependent upon God for a successful and victorious crossing. As surely as the touching of the feet of the priests literally opened the pathway for Israel into Canaan, so our feet must touch the chilling waters that separate this life from the next, and the path will be opened unto us for the safe passing and entrance into God's rest.

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Second Mile Religion

Have you noticed how difficult it is to define the religion of Jesus Christ in just a few words? There are so many sides to it, like a diamond with many facets of beauty and brilliance. It must be viewed from every direction to see its worth. It is a perfect plan for man's redemption. It is the way God has designed to reconcile man unto Himself. It even contains the teaching whereby man can live at peace with his fellowman. It is a pattern for life as well as a preparatory course for eternity. What else can make one fit for the company of angels and the heavenly hosts other than the religion of Christ?

In view of eternity and the glory of heaven, let us know that the Lord does not thrust one into the eternal state of heaven for which he is not fitted. Probably some, seeing their distaste for the things of God in this life, would be miserable if they were allowed to go to heaven. Jesus teaches that heaven is a prepared place (John 14:1ff), and it is for a prepared people.

In the Sermon on the Mount, which is the gospel of the kingdom, Jesus mentioned characteristics of those who would be citizens. This sermon is a presentation of the advance beyond the imperfect concepts and abilities of Judaism, heathenism, and paganism. It goes beyond just the actions of man. It even regulates his motives that spring from the inward man. It recognizes that man is spirit as well as body.

Matthew 5:38-42, "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 law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke 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."

The Christian Disposition

Three illustrations of a Christian disposition are given, under similar but somewhat different circumstances. (1) Being smitten. (2) Being sued at law. (3) Being compelled to go a mile against our will. Being smitten is to suffer indignity and reproach. Rather than retaliate and seek revenge, it is better to suffer it. To be sued is to have taken from you your possessions, forcefully, yet legally. But we must be willing to part with such things rather than bring shame and reproach on that for which we stand. Being compelled to go a mile refers to a practice imposed on the Jewish people by the Romans, that they had borrowed from the Persians. It was the conscript of a private citizen into government service. It was a compulsory service. If one of authority forced you into his service to accommodate him for a while, be willing to do more than what was required. We really deserve no commendation for being willing to give only the barest requirements. Luke 17:10, "*So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which was our duty to do.*" The distinctive Christian quality is to hold it a vice not to do more than is required. The "get by" attitude, do as little as I can attitude, is not what pleases God.

Application in Worship

We can make some profitable applications of a second-mile religion. Consider the periods of worship.. Some ask, "Do I have to attend Sunday evening worship, or mid-week Bible study?" Why would one who loves the Lord and is hungry for His Word even ask such a thing? I did not know a Christian did not want to worship God. Hebrews 10:25 is perceived backwards by some. We are to assemble for exhortation, not just exhort each other to assemble.

When the matter of finances and monetary support of the cause of Christ is considered, attitude is as important as amount. We are to give cheerfully, with joy, not grudgingly or because we feel that we "have to." Yes, we "have to." But those who love the Lord give because they "get to." The Macedonians gave first themselves. Their attitude was to give the heart (Second Corinthians 8). When that is done, the amount will usually take care of itself. They gave beyond what was expected. They were practicing a second-mile religion.

Application in Conduct

Mankind can sin positively and negatively. We can sin by doing what we ought not do (sins of commission), or by failing to do what we ought to do (sins of omission). We might not find it so difficult to restrain ourselves from doing what we believe will damn us to hell. But what of the good things that ought to be done? James 4:17, *"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* Are we good simply because we are not bad? In that case, even an inanimate object might be classified as good. Some measure their Christianity in terms of the evil things they do not do. They do not kill, lie, cheat, etc. This is part of being a Christian. But this could be said of a stature in the park, Their list of achievements for good are zero. There are the *"thou shalt not"* passages, but there are also the *"thou shalt"* passages. Second-mile religion does not just refrain from evil but does good.

Matthew twenty-five, beginning with verse fourteen, teaches the Lord's condemnation of the one talent man.

He was not condemned because he lost his talent or wasted it. He was not condemned because he did not double it as others had done their talents. He was condemned because he did not do what he could have done. He did not even try.

Matthew 21:18,19, *"Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforth for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away."* Why did the Lord do that?

Fig tree first bears fruit, then leaves. The presence of leaves indicates the presence of fruit. This tree, while giving the impression of bearing fruit, only bore leaves. It was not what it should have been. It was not doing as it ought to have done. Some of us may be this way.

Application in Serving

The judgment scene of Matthew 25:31-46 commends some because of the good they had done. Others were condemned, not because of the evil charged against them, but because of the failure to have done good. Though sufficient in one area, they lacked sorely in another. They went one mile, but not the second.

We must add here that we do not earn our reward, nor can we do enough good to deserve God's blessings. Even so, there are those things God teaches us to do, and when we obey God He has promised to give us His blessings.

First Kings 20:39,40, *"And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king, and said, Thy servant went out into the midst of battle; and behold, a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man, if by any means he be missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver. And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone. And the king of Israel said unto him, So shall thy judgment be; thyself hast decided it."*

A prisoner was taken and a soldier was assigned to guard him with his life. But the prisoner escaped. What

was the excuse? He was busy here and there, maybe even with matters he considered deserving of his attention. But he neglected his charge. He was not attendant to his primary duty. Just so, many are very busy in many matters today, not all of which are necessarily evil in themselves. But at what are we so busy? If we become too busy that we neglect the more vital elements of life, then we have really become too busy. We are too busy if we cannot practice the second-mile religion, doing what we ought, not doing what we ought not, and doing more than what is expected.

The First Mile

Of course, before we can concentrate on the second mile, we must cover the first mile. Before one can go the second mile, he must travel the first mile. Before you can do more than you ought in the service of God, you must do what you ought to enter the service of God. The first thing of priority in doing as you ought is to obey the gospel of Christ. Believe, repent, confess your faith in Christ, and be baptized (immersed) in water, in the name of Christ (by His authority), for (in order to) the remission of sins, into Christ and His body, the church (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27; First Corinthians 12:13), at which time and place we reach the saving blood of Christ (Romans 6:3,4). Then, not before then, can you be in a position to practice the second-mile religion.

* * * * *

Possibly there is some significance in the fact that brethren are really getting back to the fundamentals and basics of Christianity. Some never left them. It was my privilege during 1993 to speak on a number of lectureships. What stood out in my mind is how many of the assigned topics dealt with attitudes. Of the some fifteen lessons, at least twelve, possibly another, could be placed in the category of dealing with the development of proper, Christ-like attitudes. This is really getting at the heart is the matter. Once the heart is right, will not conduct follow? JWB

More and More a Sad Truth is Being Realized and Recognized

Like many brethren, I subscribe to and receive free many papers published by good brethren. I also receive some that are promoting the advance of a "restructured" church in the mode of denominations. Among the faithful there is the growing acceptance of the sad fact, a fact about which many of us have been warning for many years, that the church is being divided by false doctrines taught by false teachers and churches that once followed the Lord have decided to "do their own thing."

I see more and more the recognition of the obvious, indeed, the unavoidable, since some are determined to abandon the old paths of truth for the new age, adaptation of doctrine to culture, accommodation of a rebellious element among "baby-boomers," and a desire to be like denominations, etc. The fact is that a new and different fellowship, born of heresy, has arisen among those once loyal to Christ and His church, and it is now being stated openly as never before.

While the fact of apostasy grieves any faithful Christian, we would also contend the recognition of division and the disfellowship of the heretical elements is essential to the continued welfare of the Lord's church. They have gone out from us. They are no longer of us. A new denomination has been created from the ruins of division caused by false doctrines by false teachers. It is done! JWB

Fornication or Consummation

Among the false doctrines being taught regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage, one of the more ludicrous is the idea that a man and woman are not married until there has been sexual intercourse between them. That intercourse is what makes them married, according to this view.

Some are always seeking ways around what God teaches. Some have married and seek divorce on the grounds that the marriage was never consummated in sexual intercourse. What they do not understand is that sexual intercourse is a privilege IN marriage, and not what makes one married.

Just be a bit logical, maybe for the first time. If marriage is not marriage until the sex act, what do you have going on? You have a man and woman going to bed with each other for the sex act who are not even married to each other. Folks, that's fornication, not consummation. They are married when the preacher says, "I pronounce you husband and wife." JB

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