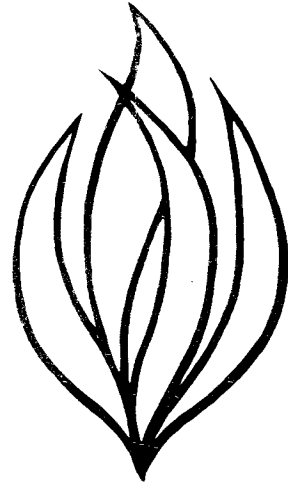


A Burning Fire



*"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

ABORTION 1

**WINNING SOULS THROUGH
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ELDERS HAVE THE AUTHORITY BC

Abortion

Those of us in the church often take too much for granted. We assume that everyone, including our children, know the difference between right and wrong on basic and fundamental matters when actually they do not because they have not been taught correctly. We are naive to think that those in the church are immune from the influence and propaganda of those who deny God and bombard our society with immorality and corruption.

Too many in the church have a hesitancy to oppose the moral degeneracy that abounds in our land, thinking, for some unexplained reason, that dealing with such matters is out of bounds for the church in its teaching. The failure of Christian people to militantly speak out and stand up for the way of right in our nation has contributed to the advance of wickedness in the nation. God does not look favorably upon such people! Christians are concerned with the salvation of souls. But they are also the "*light of the world*" and the "*salt of the earth*." We must involve ourselves in such issues lest there be a complete erosion of civilization, morality, and the concept of the dignity of the human being.

Today, nearly four thousand lives will be deliberately snuffed out. This will not occur in Russia, China, Cuba, or other God-denying and tyrannical nations. This will occur in the United States. Those whose lives shall be terminated are not victims of war, nor are they criminals receiving just punishment for crimes, but innocent babies. Abortion is being used to end unwanted pregnancies of unwed mothers by the thousands. But not only this, as we shall discuss. Abortion has become a major madness of murder in the "land of the freaks, and the home of the knaves."

The Court

The Supreme Court has ruled the legality of abortions. Our government continues to advance the practice of abortion. Christians know that the Bible teaches that

everything that is legal is not necessarily moral. A woman is permitted to abort her child during the first three months of pregnancy simply on the decision of herself and her "doctor." During the second three months she is allowed to abort her child if it is deemed needful to protect her life. Even during the final three months, even when the child is often capable of living and surviving outside the mother's womb, she is allowed to abort her child if it is thought necessary for the woman's mental, physical, or emotional health. This is so broad and can cover so much subjective consideration that it is not a protection of the child whatsoever, but actually is abortion on demand. The present government of the United States (1993) is ruled by a most degenerate band of servants of hell to occupy power in our land, and they now advocate abortion on demand, at any time, for any reason. They even would demand everybody pay for it. How can any nation survive under such godless fools?

In most major cities of the nation there are even advertisements in newspapers and on billboards advising women where they can go and have their babies destroyed. This is the low level of barbarism to which this nation has stooped.

Doctors, who have taken oaths to preserve life, have betrayed their oaths and their calling and have devoted their entire money making careers and practices to the destruction of life rather than its preservation. The abortion clinics are gleaning millions upon millions of dollars killing babies.

A Vile Deed

It will not be our purpose to be descriptive of the inhumane scenes of horror, butchery, savagery, and terror involved in the abortion processes. Those things need to be known, and those of age should even see pictures of such to impress on their minds what a horrible matter we have under consideration. But our lesson is concerned with God's attitude toward it.

While the proponents of abortion object being compared to the perpetrators of the Nazi atrocities against humanity, they are incapable of presenting a case in

their defense as to why they should not be so considered, even worse, than the Nazi murders who killed five to six million Jews over a period of years. But abortion kills from forty to fifty-five million babies every year throughout the world, and America leads the way. What the Nazis did is minor compared to what abortionists are doing all the time.

Questions

To center our thought, let us ask and pointedly answer some relevant and pertinent questions.

- (1) Is that which is in the womb alive? Obviously, yes.
- (2) When did that which is in the womb become alive? It was when the female egg and male sperm united. If it was not alive it would not grow. But it grows.
- (3) Is that which is in the mother's womb merely a part of the mother's body? Absolutely not! We hear advocates of abortion plead for the mother's right of "power over her own body." We hear them cry for choice. But the mother exercised power over her body when she engaged in sexual intercourse. Now that the child is conceived more is involved than just her body. Everything a person will become is included already in that which is in the mother's womb. There is a new body. Even though this new body is dependent upon the mother's body, it is a totally new life. It is not, as abortionists say, like a tumor, an appendix, the tonsils, or some diseased tissue that can be removed upon choice. Once conception has occurred, not only must the mother consider her body, but there must be consideration of the baby.
- (4) Is that which is in the womb human? Certainly! It is produced by humans, and is neither animal nor vegetable. The indifference toward abortion is some of the fruit of the theory of evolution that considers the human being nothing but a highly evolved animal. This is the reason we affirm that evolutionists are enemies to the dignity of humanity. Taking that theory to its logical conclusion, the disposal of any human being cannot be considered anything more than the disposal of any other animal.
- (5) Is the human life in the mother's womb innocent human life? Yes. The child is sinless, having done no evil nor guilty of sin.

(6) Does abortion willfully, deliberately, intentionally, and with premeditation and forethought destroy this innocent and human life? Yes. And this is precisely the definition of murder. This drives right to the heart of the matter. **ABORTION IS MURDER. LEGALIZED ABORTION IS LEGALIZED MURDER.**

Proverbs 6:17, among other things, lists that God hates "*hands that shed innocent blood.*" This makes a difference to civilized and moral people. God hates abortion and abortionists for what they do.

The Word of God

What does the Bible teach on this subject? That murder is prohibited is unquestioned by anyone who knows anything about the Bible. Murder by abortion, like other means of murder, are not necessarily mentioned specifically and explicitly. But conclusion can be confidently drawn with unwavering certainty from the principles of truth as well as specific statements that relate of the matter. Let us turn our attention to a few of these.

Acts 17:25, "*He giveth life to all...*" God gives life Does man, with impunity and without God's authority, have the right to terminate it? Human life is different from all other forms of life because mankind is created in the spiritual image of God (Genesis 1:26,27). For this reason human life is sacred. We are different from animals. This is the basis for human rights and dignity. Without this special characteristic we are nothing more than materialistic beasts. To impress on man the special distinction he has, and the sacredness of human life, God decreed the forfeiture of one's own life if he lacked respect for the sacredness of human life and murdered another (Genesis 9:6).

Abortion is compatible with evolution, humanism, atheism, and other anti-human and anti-God philosophies. The dignity of the human being rests solely on the Biblical teaching that man is in the spiritual image of God.

No Difference

The Bible does not distinguish between the unborn and newborn babe as far as the babe being a human being. Jeremiah 1:5, *"Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations."* Did God sanctify just a blob of tissue and ordain a tumor? None can doubt that God considered Jeremiah a person even before Jeremiah was born.

The unborn John the Baptist leaped in his mother's womb when his mother, Elizabeth, and the expectant mother of Jesus met each other. There is no question but John was considered a living person even before birth. We must ask with caution of bordering on irreverence, "Was that which was in the womb of Mary only a blob of tissue?" as abortionists contend? No God-fearing person would ever consent to such blasphemy.

Scripture uses the word "brephos" to refer to both an unborn and newborn child. Luke 1:41,44, it is used to refer to John before his birth. It is used of Jesus after His birth (Luke 2:12). It was used of newborn infants in Acts 7:19. There is no distinction because one is already a person, a distinct human being, both before and after birth, all the degenerate raving to the contrary notwithstanding.

Why Is It Done?

More often than not abortion is used to terminate pregnancies that have resulted from fornication and adultery. Unmarried couples engage in sexual intercourse without regard to morality, with no regard to the power of reproduction, with no concern for the child that might be conceived, with no regard to the spiritual welfare of anybody, and with contempt for the ways of God, with no respect for the sacredness of marriage, and when a child is conceived, to cover their sin, to shed responsibility, to dispose of what they do not want, they resort to the murder of the child. Like David, but in a different way, they resort to murder in their attempt to cover the result of their sin. Those who obey, *"Thou shalt not commit adultery,"* never have to consider abortion to cover their wickedness.

Some married and professional women are having abortions because they are more concerned with their careers, personal ambitions, selfish goals than they are the God-given role of motherhood and the responsibility of parenthood. Being encouraged by degenerate feminists (which is a redundancy because all feminists are degenerate), whose goals are opposed to the ways of God, they resort to murdering their child rather than bearing the child. God condemns those who are "*without natural affection*" (Romans 1:31), which refers to those lacking affection regarding their own children. This is certainly descriptive of those who endorse and practice abortion. It is characteristic of a depraved society.

It is ironic that some who endorse abortion even go to the Bible, which they despise, to try to justify it. Of course, abortionists have no use for God's Word, do not believe the Bible, ridicule the Bible, but think if they could use the Bible to advance their heathenism, they would do it. They contend that Adam was not alive until God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, therefore, the baby is not alive until it breathes, and in the womb it does not breathe.

While it is true that the system whereby the baby gets oxygen is changed at birth, his difference with Adam is that Adam was created mature. Adam was not alive in any sense until God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, but that is not true concerning the conceived child. He is alive from the moment of conception. If that was not true the babe would not and could not grow.

Some cite Exodus 21:22ff to make a distinction between the life of an unborn child and other human life. But that passage is evidence contrary to the arguments of abortionists. *"If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him: and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life."*

The scene is that of a struggle between two men in which a woman with child is hurt, causing the child to depart from the mother's womb. Abortionists claim. "If the

baby dies, only a fine is to be paid, but if the mother dies, the punishment is death. Therefore, the child is not considered a living person as is the mother." The fallacy of this argument is evident because abortionists read into the passage, not out of the passage.

The passage does not say if the baby dies as a result of the struggle merely a fine is to be paid. A fine is to be paid because the fruit of the womb is departed prematurely. The baby may live, and no mischief other than a premature birth occurs. Even this is to be fined according to the law.

But if "*any mischief*" follow the incident, which would certainly be true in the event of either the death of the mother or the child, then capital punishment was to be exacted. Is the death of the child no mischief? This proves that both mother and child are living persons.

Furthermore, the case under consideration in Exodus is not parallel to the deliberate, planned, premeditated destruction of innocent human life. This case was an accidental matter, not a willful destruction of the child. This passage offers no support whatever for abortion.

Hard Matters

There are some very hard questions related to this matter. This is a great emotional issue and often emotions overrule truth in the minds of some. Some ask, "Can the child be aborted to save the mother's life or if the mother's life is threatened?" The mother's life is always threatened in every birth. Dr. Jerome LeJune, famous geneticist, answered the question, "I would never attack and kill the unborn child." He further explained that if he was faced with an either/or situation, such as cancerous uterus or a tubal pregnancy, he would be forced to remove the cancer or tumor and in doing so he would inadvertently cause the child to die. But the death of the child would not be the cause of the surgery nor its purpose. The purpose was to save life, not destroy it. The motive involved is of paramount concern.

Dr. Lee Cayce, Nashville, Tennessee, who delivered so many children over his many years of medical practice,

and who was attendant at the birth of our firstborn, is reported to have said, "In all my years of practice I have never seen the case where such a choice was necessary." This does not mean such a choice is never necessary, but it is rare. Even when the choice must be made, it is a choice to save life, not to deliberately destroy life. Surely, such rare instances to save life ought not be the basis for the wholesale and indiscriminate murder of millions of babies each year!

"But what if pregnancy results from rape or incest?" We are not insensitive to the victims of such atrocious crimes, nor the emotional complications in such instances. Our hearts bleed for those who have been so mistreated. We are repulsed at the sympathy for the criminal while victims are often forgotten and neglected. If I had my way there would never be the possibility of one convicted of rape or incest ever being able to commit the same crime again, regardless of what it takes. But even in such rare instances where pregnancy might occur under such conditions, this is no basis for allowing wholesale killing of babies such as is now being done. Even under these circumstances, the dignity of human life is the overriding issue.

We have read a report of a ten year study in Minneapolis involving three thousand five hundred rape cases, and not one time did pregnancy result. We are told that the female reproductive system rarely conceives under the trauma of rape. Even when there is a rape, it takes several hours for the sperm to reach the ovum and emergency treatment by medication can prevent conception. Certainly, we are dealing with human tragedy all around in these instances. But are we to set standards according to the rare exceptions?

Other Reasons

We are told that abortion is a method of population and birth control. It certainly is. There is a similar method also, such a killing off all over sixty years of age, all those of deformity, or whoever might not be wanted. Why would not that control population? And as frightening as it is, there are those (like a former governor of Colorado) who do advocate that elderly

people consent to die for the benefit of those who are younger.

What if there is a danger of physical or mental deformity of the unborn child? Again, this is always a possibility in every birth. But do we destroy children who are born with abnormalities and deformities? Would you discontinue the programs of assistance to such people and simply kill them? Is not a deformed child a human being? And who is to decide which deformities warrant being murdered and which should be allowed to live? Shall we let the evolutionists, humanists, atheists, the Hitlers of the world make such judgments? Who do we decide to keep and who do we decide to destroy? Possibly the world would have profited if those who now advocate abortion had been the victims of what they advocate. The fact remains that there is no justification for the murder of unborn children and this is precisely what abortion is. Abortions because of rape and deformity constitute a very small percentage of the abortions being performed, but even these are wrong.

What To Do

Living in a world where this degenerate barbarism exists and grows, what can the Christian do? He must first realize the enormity of this sin and its consequences. He must reaffirm his concept of the sacredness of human life and the dignity thereof. Once society opens its doors to this kind of savagery there is no limit to the low level of conduct to which the human family will descend. The doors are already open in these United States where God is attempted to be mocked. Already some advocate infanticide, euthanasia, genocide, the destruction of unwanted races. The only positive thing that can be said for abortion (and this benefit is already past) is how better the world would be if the parents of the proponents of it had practiced it!

Christians must remember the basis of human dignity and how mankind is created in the spiritual image of God. We must emphasize before the world, actively, militantly, aggressively, before it is beyond the point of return, the Christian standards of morality, individual

responsibility for one's actions, the sanctify of the home and marriage. We must steadfastly resist the moral degenerates, feminists, politicians, and parasites on society whose profane mouths must be stopped before they uproot every semblance of human dignity to accommodate their vile ways. More often than not, these opponents of everything good are led by homosexuals, lesbians, prostitutes, money-hungry doctors, fornicators, adulterers, disgruntled females who are unhappy with their role in life and who are miserable, and who want everybody else to accommodate their sinfulness and share their misery by determining the pattern for all society. Our enemies are anti-God, anti-Christ, anti-Bible, anti-church, anti-marriage, anti-morality, dominated by whores and whoremongers whose lives overrun with all forms of moral filth and vile pollution. We need to know our enemy and the nature of these vicious opponents of God and truth. They are people who have become so corrupt that they seek to dignify every vice and denounce every virtue, legalize every perversion and ridicule God's plan for mankind.

They will be found promoting the Equal Rights Amendment, are members of the National Organization of Women, will vote for those who advocate sin, will court the favor of such movements to reach office, advocate the extraction of tax funds to provide for the murder of children for all who want it, who prostitute the ideals of womanhood and motherhood because their minds are so filled with the evil of Satan they cannot and will not see.

We are naive to think we are against a people who listen to reason or are persuaded by truth. This they hold in contempt. We are against the most venomous and cruel tyrants with evil minds our world can consider. While our hearts grieve because of their mental, physical, and spiritual condition, we cannot be so blind as to allow them to force their wickedness down the throats of us all, and for forthcoming generations. We live in a sinful world, and a nation that grows worse and worse each day. God bless America? Why should He?

* * * * *

Winning Souls Through Christian Unity

First Timothy 1:15, *"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."*

Luke 19:10, *"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."*

Matthew 1:21, *"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins."*

It was the work and mission of Jesus Christ to save lost souls. It is the work of His body, the church, to continue winning souls. Before Jesus ascended into heaven He charged, Mark 16:15,16, *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned."* Matthew 28:19,20, *"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."*

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."* It is the work of the church to uphold and proclaim the saving truth of Jesus Christ. Those that hear and heed will be saved. Those that don't, won't.

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."* How is this gospel to be spread? First Corinthians 1:21,

"For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

Whatever promotes the spread of the gospel, provided it is in harmony with the Lord's will, is beneficial. Whatever hinders that spread is detrimental. Our study shall focus attention on unity as something beneficial to the power of the gospel, while division is a hindrance. We shall divide the lesson into two main parts.

The Bible teaches the necessity of conversion to be saved. Acts 3:19, *"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."* Matthew 18:3, *"Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."* There are not many ways of conversion. There is only one way. We either follow the way the Lord has given or we shall remain lost in sin. When those who are in Christ are united they will be aggressive and active in winning the lost to Christ and salvation.

Unity

What is unity? Although that may seem to be a peculiar question, it is obvious that many do not know the unity of which the Bible speaks. Unity means agreement. Amos 3:3, *"Can two walk together except they be agreed?"* Unity is not agreeing to disagree. Unity is not mere union. You can put a dog and a cat in a sack and you have union, but not unity. Unity is not mere togetherness.

John 17:20,21, *"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word: that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."* As the Godhead is united, so God wants His people united. This means they will talk alike. First Corinthians 1:10, *"Now I beseech you, brethren,, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the*

same mind and in the same judgment." Usually, at least in the past, when you heard a preacher on the radio, it would not take long for you to identify him as a brother in Christ by the way he talked. He would speak "*sound words*" and preach "*sound doctrine*." He would speak as the oracles (First Peter 4:11; Titus 2:1,8; Second Timothy 1:13). To have the same mind demands using the same standard by which to determine what is true or false.

Ephesians 4:4 teaches that there is "*one faith*," just as there is "*one body*," which is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23). Nothing in Scripture allows man to take his choice of faiths, churches, etc.

Philippians 1:27, "*Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel.*" This means brethren are to have the same spiritual goals, the same message, working together hand in hand and heart with heart for the salvation of the lost. One reason the early church grew as it did was the oneness among brethren. Acts 2:42, "*And all that believed were together.*"

This new and false doctrine propagated by liberal digressives who have gone out from the church preaching "unity in diversity" even in matters of doctrine and faith is a vile and venomous heresy that plagues the church and hinders conversion to Christ. God will not consider the proponents of such error guiltless.

Division Generally

The second part of our lesson centers on those areas where division hinders conversion and soul winning. First, we shall consider the religious division in the world generally, and then matters of division in the home and in the church.

The devil works effectively in our world with false doctrines and ideas that divide those who say they love God from those who care nothing about God. There are many honest and sincere people who say they love the

Lord but are following ways that are contrary to the will of the Lord. There are even philosophies and theories that contend there is no right or wrong. To some, everything is beautiful in its own way, and everyone is urged to "do your own thing." Such is the hue and cry of humanism. It ushers in a society of permissiveness, corrupting morality and undermining every fundamental sacred matter. "To each his own" is the wall of those who reject God.

Of course, if such doctrines were true, the entire mission of Christ was useless because everything is all right just as it is, regardless of what it is. Can we really heed such as that? Any doctrine that contradicts itself is unfit for acceptance. Those that would follow a self-contradictory doctrine are as those in Second Timothy 2:25, "*Those that oppose themselves.*"

If there is no right or wrong, how can we know it is right to believe there is no right or wrong? If you cannot determine what is true as distinguished from what is false, how can we know it is true to say we cannot say what is true or false? If each is to "do his own thing," you have as many laws and lawmakers as people. If each is left as his own judge and jury, this is sheer and transparent anarchy and chaos. Such a time existed in Judges 21:25, "*In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*" Little doubt that the many voices clamoring, "Lo here, Lo there, follow this, follow that, follow anything, follow nothing" has caused many to turn a deaf ear even to Christ.

Even among the religious there is wholesale division. We have Romanism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Moonies, Mohammedans, on and on. There are literally hundreds of varying denominations, each with its distinctive doctrines and names. There is nothing in the Bible that would authorize or justify such as this.

The Lord's Church is Not a Denomination

Let us remember that the Lord's church is not a denomination, nor a combination of denominations. Once a television panelist was asked, "With all the

different churches, how can you ever tell which one is right?" The answer is simple. Search the Scriptures and learn what the truth is, and accept that, rejecting all else. The point we make here is that division causes many to give up their search in despair.

I once engaged a man from India in conversation and he asked my line of work. I told him I was a gospel preacher. He was of some Oriental faith. But he made one comment that was momentarily disarming. "If your God is as mixed up as the Protestant world, He is more confused than I am. He needs me, but I don't need Him." I tried to explain that I agreed with that, but that I was not promoting the chaotic so-called Christendom, but the faith of Christ as the New Testament teaches. But you can understand the problem he faced.

Havoc of Division

Jesus knew what this division would bring and He prayed for unity that the world might believe. Division, such as characterizes denominationalism cultivates the ground for the seeds of atheism. It produces hopelessness, waste, duplication, confusion, contradiction, and doubt. If all of us who say we believe in God and Jesus Christ His Son would cast aside the man-made doctrines and churches we could rout atheism in record time, putting that influence almost out of business. But when people continue using their creeds, manuals, prayer books, catechisms, disciplines, confessionals, edicts of councils and conferences, how can there be unity? People now are even using so-called Bibles that do not teach alike. Once there was the faith of your choice, the church of your choice, and now, with these modern speech perversions, the Bible of your choice. The early church had problems, but not denominationalism. We need to learn the answer to the question, "Will good people in all churches be saved?" How can they be when churches other than Christ's church are not pleasing to God nor teaching His way?

It is not that people cannot see the Bible alike. They are not even looking at it many times. It is not that we interpret differently. To interpret means to get the meaning of it. God did not give us a book that divides

and condemns division and commands unity at the same time. He is not the author of confusion (First Corinthians 14:33). Let us not blame God for human mistakes.

Division in the Home

Religious division in the home is a tremendous hindrance to winning souls for Christ. One going one way, the other doing differently, what are children to think? They often abandon everything about God. How can a religious parent do right by marrying a non-religious one. We need to ask before marriage, "What kind of influence will this person have on our children, if we have any?" Children love both parents and are confused. One asked, "Why did not God build just one church so we could be together?" The truth is, God did build just one church.

Marrying outside the Lord's church is daring the devil to take your soul and the souls of children that may come into that home. How can a Christian consent to enter into such a relationship where his own Lord and Savior cannot be first?

Division in the Church

But there is also division in the church that hinders winning souls. When church A is at odds with church B, people outside the church seldom understand. They are turned off by both of them. You say, "They ought to investigate," and I agree. But few will. They ought not have to investigate. We ought to hold fast to sound words and be united.

Some talk how outsiders run down the church. This is often true. But nothing runs down the church quicker and more effectively than division among brethren. Some never have a good word about their preacher, the elders, anybody in the church, and wonder why they cannot convert anybody. Some even degrade their brethren before non-Christians. What a shameful manner of behavior!

False teachers split churches, and hobby pushers want their own way. Those who rebel in worldliness against the teaching of Christ and reject the necessity for divine authority hinder soul winning. Six things even seven, God hates (Proverbs 6:16-19), including *"he that soweth discord among brethren."*

When you love the Lord's church it hurts to see it disrupted and torn asunder. Consider the soldier who threw the spear that ripped the body of Christ while on the cross. How does he differ from one who rends the church asunder? Some are like hard headed Diotrophes (Third John 9), and confuse their stubbornness with steadfastness. They had rather tear up the church than give up their pride, personal ambitions, and their own way. Children, outsiders, everyone see this, and they go away, still lost. We give a false impression of Christ when this occurs.

Christ is the only way of eternal life (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Unity can be attained and maintained only when all are content to abide in the doctrine of Christ. Why should it be any other way? We love each other and should work for harmony, unity, based on truth, a *"thus saith the Lord"* in all matters. The world needs the efforts of Christians to spread the saving Word, and their energies ought not be expended having to fight a rear guard action against digressives and apostates. Souls can be reached, and they depend on us to take the gospel to them. Our success depends to a great degree on our unity, or our failure on the lack of it.

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Covetousness

Through the years I have discovered that many people do not mind the condemnation of sin. Irreligious people do not get too upset over it. They do not care. Religious people will often relish it. This usually is the case, until you get specific. Talking about sin in general is not as disturbing as talking about some specific sin. But just

now we need to consider a specific sin, one that many would dismiss as not too important, and certainly one of which they are not guilty, they think. We shall study what God teaches about the sin of covetousness.

To covet means to have a desire, but it is certain type of desire. It means to long for, crave, especially something that belongs to another. It is a denotation of the existence of greed, the love of money, or the things money can buy. It is not to be equated with ambition or a desire to succeed, but it is an over-reaching ambition, even to the extent that one would take advantage of another to reach his goal. It is usually associated with the insatiable desire for material things and money, but not exclusively such things, such a satisfying his lust.

All desire is not evil. When Paul wrote concerning the spiritual gifts (First Corinthians 12), he urged them to covet the best gifts. First Timothy 3:1, *'If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.'* But covetousness is an evil, inordinate, unlawful desire.

Biblical References

There are many references in the Bible concerning this sin. *"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's."* (Exodus 20:17). Jesus said, *"Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."* (Luke 12:15). *"But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not once be named among you, as becometh saints."* (Ephesians 5:3). The sinfulness of covetousness is underscored in Scripture. *"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth, fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry."* (Colossians 3:5). Paul calls coveting idolatry. It dethrones God in one's life and replaces Him with material things. Jesus said, *"No man can love two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."* (Matthew 6:24). We have to decide what shall be first in our lives, God or material things. There is not room at the top for both.

The seriousness of this sin is seen in Ephesians 5:5, "*For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*" In other words, covetousness will bar a person from heaven.

Covetousness is a characteristic of those the Lord labels as reprobate (Romans 1:18-32). It is also a mark found among false teachers (Second Peter 2:3,4). There are those that would teach anything or leave out anything in their teaching if it brought them the money they want. This is possibly one of the reasons why the Lord's church has suffered at times with weak, erroneous, watered-down teaching. Some preachers and teachers prefer the large salaries more than they love the truth and if the truth should offend they would lose that money. So they leave out, add to, change up the word of God for money. Paul said covetousness would be a characteristic of those perilous times of apostasy (Second Timothy 3:1,2).

Becoming Covetous

One does not become covetous overnight. It is not a sudden illness that falls upon one. Rather it is an attitude that grows, develops, and is cultivated and nurtured. It gradually entwines itself around a person's heart and life as a vine does a young tree, and just as effectively chokes the life out of it. Covetousness is a spiritual disease of the heart. Jesus said, "*For from within, out of the heart of man proceed... covetousness... All these evil things come from within and defile the man.*" (Mark 7:21-23).

Its Effects

Covetousness affects adversely the lives of people. It causes domestic trouble in the home. Proverbs 15:27, "*He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house.*" It is a problem of the heart that will even cause a person to scoff and deride Christ. When Jesus taught that man could not serve two masters, the Pharisees, who were covetous, derided Him (Luke 16:14). When covetous, our eyes are blinded from the truth. Paul warned, "*But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought*

nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us therewith be content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil, which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." (First Timothy 6:6-10).

People will become liars, thieves, gamblers, fornicators, forsake their duties, offer and take bribes, even murder people for the sake of money. Even some who profess to be Christians will compromise and sacrifice the truth of God in order to obtain more and more money. There is not a sin people have not committed and would commit again for money. This is the plague of materialism, materialism in the sense of getting, having, holding on to things of a material nature.

Too many people are more concerned about what they might get than they are with what ought to be. Success in our society is so often measured in terms of possessions rather than character and honor. Many focus their attention on what one has rather than what one is. We need to be careful that we not be more concerned about a high standard of living than living by a high standard.

In Israel's History

As one studies the history of Israel we often find them in times of adversity and poverty. But in such times they were humble, penitent, obedient to God. But they would fail the test of prosperity. In their abundance they would turn from God. Covetousness is particularly a danger and a threat when there is abundance because there is created the love for the material wealth and the desire for more and more.

Covetousness disqualifies a person from service to God. A man cannot serve the Lord as an elder or bishop if he is a covetous man or greedy of filthy lucre (First Timothy 3:3,8). Covetousness disqualifies one from fellowship with the Lord's church. *"I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators, yet not*

altogether with the fornicators of this world, for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother, be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a raller, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, with such an one, no, not to eat." (First Corinthians 5:9-11).

Not Just the Rich

Covetousness is not a sin found just among the rich. Those who are in poverty and difficult circumstances can also be greedy and lustful of material things and sin in order to obtain them.

In the Bible we read of covetous people. There was Ahab who coveted the vineyard that belonged to Naboth. He and his wife Jezebel committed many transgressions against God and man in order to get it.

Achan stole that which belonged to the Lord's treasury and hid it in his tent. His sin brought hardship upon the entire nation of Israel, and he eventually lost his life because of his greediness.

Gehazi, servant of Elisha, after Naaman had offered Elisha gifts and Elisha had refused them, ran after Naaman and told him lies in order to take advantage of Naaman's generosity. Gehazi was covetous of money and clothes. His sin only brought him rebuke and leprosy.

Did not Judas even betray his Lord for thirty pieces of silver? Was not the rich, young ruler sorrowful when he learned he had to separate himself from his wealth to follow Jesus (Matthew 19:16-22)? He could not bring himself to leave his possessions. Annanias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit about their giving and were struck dead. They wanted to hold on to some of their money even as they wished to make it appear they had given all. Covetousness got hold of all these people, and it brought injury to every one of them.

We are impressed with the family of sins with which God associates the sin of covetousness. The reader is urged to read Romans 1:18-32; First Corinthians 5:9-11; First Corinthians 6:9,10; Colossians 3:5).

The Fruits

Realizing the tragedy that covetousness does bring, we need to understand that covetousness is so useless, productive of nothing good, but only evil. Solomon wrote, *"He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase; this is also vanity. When goods increase, they are increased that eat them; and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes? The sleep of the laboring man is sweet whether he eat little or much, but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep. There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. But those riches perish by evil travail, and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand. As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go, and what profit hath he that hath labored for the wind? All his days also he eateth in darkness and he hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.:"* (Ecclesiastes 5:10-17).

Paul echoed these sentiments in First Timothy 6:7,17, *"For we brought nothing into this world and it is certain we can carry nothing out... Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy."*

A Fool

The only person that Jesus specifically called a fool during His personal ministry was a covetous man. In the parable of the man who prospered and increased his wealth and built more barns to hold his wealth, but neglected his soul, the statement is made by the Lord to him, *"Thou fool; this night shall thy soul be required of thee. Then whose shall all these things be, which thou hast provided?"* (Luke 12:20). Again Jesus taught, *"For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lost his own soul."* (Matthew 16:26).

Rather than being covetous, Jesus taught, "*Lay not up for yourselves treasure upon the earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt and where thieves do not break through and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*" (Matthew 6:19-21).

Lacking in Faith

To be covetous is to demonstrate a lack of faith in the providence of God. Jesus taught, "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.*" (Matthew 6:33). David said, "*I have been young and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread.*" (Psalm 37:25). "*Let your conversation be without covetousness and be content with such things as ye have; for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.*" (Hebrews 13:5,6).

Rather than being covetous, let us honor God with our substance (Proverbs 3:9). "*Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labor with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.*" (Ephesians 4:28). Let us be good stewards of that which God has entrusted to our care in this life, using it to His glory. May we pray, in the words of 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.*"

First Things First

The teaching against covetousness does not discourage ambition and financial success. But it helps us keep our priorities in order and to labor for that which is lasting. We need to have the right set of values. Striving for the things of the here and now, even to the neglect of what is more important, is a sad mistake.

Parents often have forsaken the needs of their children while giving themselves to making more money. Mothers have left the home for the market place, not because of need, but due to greed for more money. Contributions have been shaved, people go into debt, and even try to beat their debtors, all because they have allowed covetousness to invade their hearts, lives, and pattern of life.

This lesson is needed by the business man, young families just getting started, those in prosperity or poverty, older people who reflect their greed by holding on to money more than they should and not giving as they ought. We are besieged by advertising to buy, get, have more and more, bigger, better. We need rather to "*set your affection on things above and not on things on the earth.*" (Colossians 3:2). Covetousness can destroy the soul. Let it not be characteristic of us.

* * * * *

You probably noticed if you have read this issue that the lessons are considerably longer than we usually produce. The sermons when verbally preached were longer than usual. It was not intended to be that way nor intended not to be that way. We simply felt the subjects under consideration demanded more space than most of the lessons we present. We were more concerned with the subject matter than length. Of course, you understand fully.

You might remember the next time you hear a sermon that it is almost impossible to discuss every subject adequately within the exact same time span. Give your preacher a break if he goes longer sometimes than you think he ought. He cannot always get what should be said into your time frame. Don't be in too big a hurry that you miss truth you need.

Elders Have The Authority

In every association of people who work together for a common cause there must those who have authority to decide, direct, and keep the work on course. The Lord's church is no different in this respect. The government of the Lord's church does not have any organization larger than the local church. The local church is overseen by elders or bishops (Acts 20:28).

The Last Word

Elders, nor anyone else, have authority to change the will of God. This is what batters the church today. There are those who seek to change even the pattern of the church to fit our modern and degenerate culture. But nobody has that right.

But elders do have authority in matters of judgment and opinion to rule for the local congregation. That, along with other duties, is one of the reasons for their existence as an eldership. Without someone to do this chaos and anarchy would exist even in the church. The congregation is taught to "submit" to the elders in such matters (Hebrews 13:17). God's way work fine. JWB

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

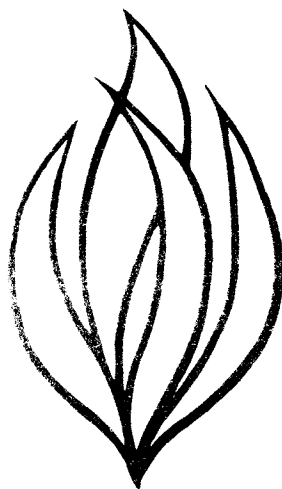
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A Burning Fire



*"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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How Many Does It Take?

A realistic and objective view of our nation reveals a deadly spiritual poverty across the land. As a people we are plunging ourselves into a self-imposed destruction due to sin. Sin is more open, widely acclaimed to be the "in" thing, more accepted, promoted, endorsed, admired, advocated, and imitated than any time in the lifetime of people living today. Society waxes worse and worse, and no thoughtful person can deny it. A survey of the songs, television programs, movies, books, political aspirants, magazines, educational emphasis, dress, language, violence levels, speech, lack of personal responsibility, various forms of entertainment, the deterioration of the family, home, marriage, all point the same direction. America is a wicked nation and getting more so. More and more there is the removal of Biblical restraints, and higher and higher go the levels of degeneracy that has become as American as apple pie. Who in their right mind could defend the trend of American life over the past thirty or more years, since the rebellious age of the sixties especially?

There is a growing number of people who seek to impose a totally different and radical moral standard which amounts to no moral standard at all. The feminists, evolutionists, humanists, drug promoters, and the "get re-elected regardless of how" politicians are having their day to the suppression and destruction of things sacred, honorable, and decent. "Do your own thing" has become the religion, wail, and cry for too long. We suffer in a period of confusion, moral chaos, disorder, and growth of evil. With many people, even some who claim to be religious, sin is just not a valid concept anymore.

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.*" Proverbs 14:34, "*Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people.*" Galatians 6:7,8, "*Be not deceived. God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth, that*

shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." Romans 15:4, *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning..."* The history of Northern Israel and Southern Judah, as well as that of heathen nations, serves us well to show the results of the pursuit of evil. It is past time for Americans to wake up to the reality of our conditions if we be spared the wrath of God.

Still Worth Saving

In spite of many undeniable faults, I would persuade us all that America is worth saving for several reasons. I would not say this because of our material abundance, but because of our heritage of freedom and respect for the dignity of mankind. This dignity is founded on the fact that man is in the spiritual image of God. In our land the Lord's church is more populous than any other locality. Historically we have been a bastion for human dignity, freedom, and justice founded on divine principles. Many are saying today that should abandon these principles.

In spite of some years of slavery, a terrible blight and evil period for the nation (the wages of which we still reap today), the governmental framework of the land has been resistant to tyranny. America is our home, and likely the home of our descendants. For their sake, something must be done, and that right early. America is threatened as never before, not only from without, but with a more sinister threat from within. Who will save it? Can it be saved? How many will it take? If any should doubt the desirability of saving America, we suggest a comparison with any other nation on the face of the earth, or in human history.

Our Most Pressing Need

Spiritual salvation is our greatest need. There is but one spiritual Savior, Jesus Christ. Acts 4:12, *"Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name given among men whereby we must be saved."* The threat of the invading oriental religions, Muslims, cults, human denominations, and shrines to human wisdom called

schools, they all threaten America. *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh unto the Father but by me."* (John 14:6). Whether we speak of an individual or of a nation composed of individuals, the only One to follow is Christ because only He has the capacity to save America from its doom brought on by transgressions against God.

Our Role

Christian people are the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13), and the preservative influence in society. They are the light of the world in the midst of sinful darkness (Matthew 5:14). Christians have the power and privilege of prayer (James 5:16). God has overruled in the affairs of nations (Daniel 4:24; 5:21, 23, 25, 27; John 19:10,11). Could He not do so again? With Christians as the leavening influence for good, righteousness could permeate throughout society again.

We must learn the source, the real source, of our strength. It is not in armies, navies, bombs, rockets, missiles, Wall Street, etc. We do not affirm these are evil to be disposed. But we affirm there must be more than that. Such weaponry has come and gone in other nations now extinct. Such have been built and destroyed over and over again. Our strength is not economic, material wealth and power, even though we be the richest of all the lands of the earth. It is a grievous display of misdirection when our leaders cry, "It's the economy that matters." Sure, it matters. But that it not what matters most.

Nor does our power lie in diplomacy, treaties, negotiations, and assemblies of nations, even though such things have their place. None of them are any more reliable than the people who have made them. What confidence can this nation have in the atheistic, ruthless, murderous governments of the world? Who could trust a humanist, evolutionist, or any such people? They do not even consider themselves accountable! Our best force is not in science, technology, human wisdom and education, although these can be a positive factor if we use them rightly.

A Continuing Truth

We must underscore Proverbs 14:34, "*Righteousness exalteth a nation.*" The Lord is our strength. We must not turn away from Him. When Judah's enemies were knocking at the gate of Jerusalem, Isaiah encouraged the king and his people to rely, not on their allies, or themselves, but on God. When Jonathan encountered the Philistines, First Samuel 14:6, he said, "*...for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few.*" Our strength is of divine origin, spiritual strength, moral strength, not human and worldly strength and wisdom.

In Other Times

In the days of the Israelite judges, Israel was enslaved by the Midianites. The number of Midianites was as grasshoppers and their camels without number. God called Gideon and Gideon called for volunteers to deliver the land. First, there came thirty-five thousand, but God said that was too many. Twenty-two thousand returned home in fear. But the ten thousand who remained were still too many. The number was reduced to three hundred men who believed in God, and in Gideon, and who followed God's plan precisely (Judges 7). How many righteous people will it take to preserve America?

Did not God preserve the entire human race from total destruction by saving eight souls? The world was once so evil that God repented that He had made it. Yet, all were not destroyed because Noah and his family were upright and were people of faith. Through them God provided a way of preservation. God can save by many or by few.

Nehemiah, with only a handful of fellows, aroused the people of Judah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. In spite of the odds against them, fighting with one hand and building with the other, they removed the reproach from Jerusalem. How many will it take to rebuild the spiritual walls of America?

Our Lord appointed only twelve men to go forward and take the appeal of the gospel into all the world. How many does it take when there is real and sincere dedication to the task?

Genesis 18:20-33 tells of the warning from God to Abraham of His intent to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. If ten righteous souls could have been found the cities would have been spared. Can we doubt that America has already been spared this far because of the righteous souls in the land who believe and serve God through Christ according to the New Testament? The Lord's church is the dike that has been holding back the tides of disaster. The spiritual and moral goodness of people, the honest, sincere Christians and their influence, have been the redeeming quality for this nation. But now there are severe and indisputable evidences that even this dike is cracking before our very eyes with the invasion of liberalism and division, and truth is losing its influence.

Will It Happen Again?

It has been the case in times past, and may well be again, that the righteous have to suffer because of the wrath of God upon a land that is so dominated by evil. But thus far even the wicked have been blessed because of the righteousness of a few.

Whether God will preserve America and its freedom I dare not predict. Frankly, I am not overly optimistic, seeing our people have decided to place in the highest ruling offices of the land the most degenerate, depraved, anti-Christian, immoral reprobates that have ever occupied power in the land in all its history (written in 1993). As abominable as our rulers show themselves to be, executive, judicial, legislative, national, state, local, the saddest reality is that they probably represent the level of morality in the country among the population as a whole. And I know what the Bible teaches. We reap as we sow. I know what sin does to a nation. To a large degree, it depends on America's response to the call to repent. This call going forth will be sent by those who believe the truth. This is where Christians enter the picture again. God expects Christians to rise to the task.

If you had lived at the time of Noah, would you have been invited to enter the ark, or be left outside to drown with the rest of the wicked? Would you have been one of

the three hundred chosen to remain with Gideon as the enemies of God's people were routed?

Regardless of what the future holds for our nation, our duty is clear. We must stand, whether we be few or many. We must be active, aggressive, militant, outspoken, uncompromising, sacrificial, steadfast, and confident in our position. We cannot be cowardly, neutral, compromising, fearful, passive, and assume a pretended piety that only hides abominable traits under a feigned cloak of righteousness. We must demonstrate real conviction. You just do not see a great amount of what is necessary among Americans today. Even many in the church are such disappointments as they give in, give up, and side with sin, culture, error, and depart from truth.

Do you have the attitude of Joshua? Joshua 24:15, *"Choose you this day whom ye will serve, ...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."* We are the only ones that can save ourselves, our nation, and our descendants through Christ. We are the only ones who can keep freedom, truth, human dignity, and righteousness alive for generations that may come.

For Evil to Win

All it takes for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing. It is not like Christ to wait for the other person to act. We must let the wicked know they shall not pass. What a shame to let the devil capture our nation and its historically good qualities be removed and not even give him a fight!

Our message is a call to resolution, commitment, determination, and Biblical conviction from that number who say they love God and His righteousness. That number can provide the reasons for the preservation of our land and its freedom for the next generations. Do you have this resolve? Are you determined to do what is open to you? Will you stand? What will you be doing? When will you start doing it?

* * * * *

Making Decisions

Over the years I have discovered that one of the most rapidly rejected efforts is the offering of unsolicited advice. People had just as soon not be advised unless they request it, unfortunately. Many who do request it really prefer someone to simply agree with them rather than really advise with them. Nonetheless, sometimes advice is what we need whether we want it or not. Advice on making decisions is one such matter, so here goes.

There are some things over which we have no control and have no power of choice. Some things are set, predetermined, foreordained, and there is nothing we can do about it. They are bound to take place. For instance, we have no power to control the rising and setting of the sun, that we shall die, be raised, judged, and exist in eternity. We cannot set the will of God for that has already been done. Nor can we alter the fact that we have a duty to God and our fellowman. That there exists good and evil in the world is not ours to control, although we have something to say about our little corner and whether we do good or evil.

But there are many matters about which we not only may, but absolutely must, make decisions. God has created man with the power of choice, a spirit, a mind, an intellect by which we can think, reason, determine, and decide. Furthermore, God holds man accountable for his decisions. We will either enjoy or suffer the consequences of our choices (Second Corinthians 5:10).

Unavoidable

There is one decision that we face that is unavoidable. We have to decide what we shall do regarding Christ. The very nature of Christ and His will demands that a decision be made. *"No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other or he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."* (Matthew 6:24). *"He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."* (Matthew 12:20). Such statements demand the

making of a choice where you will stand. The attempt to be neutral is impossible because that is a decision to not be for Him, which, He says, is to take a position against Him. So any way one goes, he must make a decision about the Christ.

Decisions ought not be made hastily and rashly, especially those that are significant and have such a tremendous bearing on life and eternity. We must be cautious and careful, yet, at the same time, willing to make the decisions that are necessary. But we need to know how to make good decisions. We need to know what to take into account. A decision is a very personal matter and each must make it for himself or herself because nobody else can make it for them. We can advise and help one another, but ultimately the burden comes to rest upon the shoulders of each one alone. We hear people say, "It is my decision to make." By that they mean they have the right to decide, but by it that also show they have the responsibility to decide and cannot shift that responsibility to any other.

Israel and Moses

We read of people facing decisions in the Bible. When Elijah, the great prophet of God, confronted Israel to decide whether they would serve God or Baal, he said, "*How long halt ye between two opinions?* (First Kings 18:21). The time had come when they could no longer straddle the fence, so to speak. Moses had to make a choice what he would do with his life. "*By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharoah's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he had recompense of the reward.*" (Hebrews 11:24-26).

As Moses approached the end of life, he came before the people of Israel and called upon them to make the right decision regarding service to God. "*See I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil, in that I command thee this day to love the Lord, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply, and the*

Lord thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to possess it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, choose life that both thou and thy seed may live, that thou mayest love the Lord thy God and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him, for he is thy life, and the length of thy days, that thou mayest dwell in the land which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob, to give them.” (Deuteronomy 30:15-20).

Joshua’s Choice

A similar statement was expressed by Joshua to the people he had led for many years as he was about to relinquish the reins of leadership. *“Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt, and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:14,15).*

Now let us establish a few guidelines which will help us make wiser decisions. The decisions we make reflect our character, our goals, our priorities and values in life. We must consider the major and important matters seriously because they have such an effect on us. We have to take into account our faith, training, conscience, and others. We will not be content with decisions that violate what we are convinced is the right thing to do.

Consider God

Our decisions must be made according to the answer to such questions as, “From whence did you come?” We come from God. He is the Father of our spirits (Hebrews 12:9). “Why are you here?” Solomon says to fear God and

keep His commandments because this is the whole duty of man (Ecclesiastes 12:13). "Where are you going?" The Bible teaches but two destinies open to us, heaven or hell (Matthew 25:46). The answer to these questions will determine what you consider yourself to be. Each of us is a soul that shall not only live on earth, but exist in eternity. We are worth more than all the world, according to Christ (Mark 8:36).

Decisions ought to be made only after asking, "What would Christ have me to do?" After all, He is the Lord. I have a duty to Him. What would He want in this matter? How will the way I decide affect my relationship with God, the church, and my service as a Christian? Many people have taken up residence, assumed jobs, married mates, without proper consideration to such things. The result has so often been spiritually disastrous.

Consider Others

We have an influence on those around us just like they have an influence on us. While it cannot be allowed to be the overruling factor in decision making, we must consider others. "*No man liveth to himself...*" (Romans 14:7). Such decisions as your life's work, your marriage mate, your friends and associates, your place of worship, all will have a tremendous bearing on your happiness and success in this world before God, and also on those around you.

Long Range

Too often we make decisions with only a view to the immediate conditions and circumstances and do not consider sufficiently the future and the long range implications that will follow. We cannot make decisions only thinking of the here and now, only considering this life. After this life is over, what then?

There is the story of a man who was speaking with his son about the son's future plans. He asked the boy what he intended to do. The son responded that he hoped to get a college education. This pleased the father, who then asked, "What then?" The son responded he expected to get a job. That was fine, but what then? He hoped he

would marry. This was expected, but what then? Then he planned to rear a family. This was nice, but the father asked again, "What then?" After that the son expected to someday retire. This was customary, but again, "What then?" The son thought for a while and said, "I suppose I will someday die." The father said, "That's right. What then?" The things we decide must be decided with the inclusion of the reality that we shall be in eternity. We must ever ask, "What then?"

Consider Your Family

What effect will the way I decide have on my family and their welfare? Satan will take advantage of every situation in life if we allow it. He will drive wedges between us and those we love unless we consider them in what we decide. By now we ought to see that decisions are crucial turning points in our lives. While we ought not approach them with fear, we do need to realize that even a minor decision can sometimes turn us a certain direction, a direction that may not be apparent for some time later after we have traveled the road much further. We must consider our example before others, our faithfulness to God, our response to duty, our family, and the soul that shall be judged at last.

Consider Wisdom in Others

In making decisions we show ourselves wise to consult with those who have experience, who love us, who truly seek our welfare, who want the best for us, whose lives have been godly, who have demonstrated that they know what does and does not really matter in life. Godly people are the best friends one can have. As we have said, each must make his or her own decision, but godly counsel is such an asset. The counsel of the ungodly will not bless us (Psalm 1). How foolish to seek guidance of those who fail, those whose hearts and minds reflect no real concern for the wishes of God., Why ask a divorcee how to have a good marriage? Why ask parents whose children have left every principle of good and right how to rear children? Why ask a man who has never done anything but fail in every endeavor he has undertaken how to succeed? Why ask the ungodly how to live before God in an acceptable manner? We deprive ourselves of

some of the very best information available when we shut ourselves off from the counsel of the wise and godly people around us.

Prayer

No decision ought be made without prayer. Christians have the right of prayer, the privilege to attract the attention of the One who oversees all things. We believe in the providence of God. We know God cares, and we trust His promises to provide and protect. We ask for failure when we do not ask God for His guidance through His Word and seek His providential means.

Without Regret

But there is another point about decision making that experience tells us is something essential. Once we have considered the matter with the inclusion of the guidelines we have mentioned, with caution, careful, considerate and prayful, deciding with a view to God's Word and eternity, and how it affects others, once we make the decision, live with it without regret. Even if it later develops that it was not the best decision, you have no regret concerning it because you made it according to the best you could do at the time. As one goes through life and looks back at some of the decisions he has made (hindsight is usually almost perfect), he sees where he might have done much better if he had decided a different way than he did. But in addition to profiting from hindsight and seeing mistakes, he can know that he made his decision in the wisest and most righteous manner he knew how at the time, and then he has no trouble living with his decision. Like Paul, sometimes we have to forget those things which are behind (Philippians 3:13,14). Regret is a heavy burden to bear. We can be free of guilt, but regret is often our companion for life. We can avoid a lot of regret by approaching decision making properly, and then having the attitude that you did what you could at the time when you could. Some things we might even be able to undo. There are some things for which we only have one turn and no second chance and cannot be undone. But if we will make decisions with these principles in mind, we can accept whatever might be the results of them.

Matter of Choice

Living right is by choice. It does not just happen. We have to make a conscious, deliberate decision to live right. Salvation is a deliberate decision. Such men as Agrippa, Felix, and others tried to make no decision and thereby decided to remain lost.

Life is something like going through the cafeteria line, taking this and leaving that. Then, eventually, there comes the time to pay for what you have chosen and taken. Let us choose wisely. Cain, Adam, so many others made bad decisions to their ruin. Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, many others, chose God's way. But when one follows the teaching of Christ, he will decide as he ought.

Now, armed with this bit of advice, solicited or not, may it be that we will make better decisions in the future.

* * * * *

The Church: Principles and Plea

When we speak of the church of Christ we use the term in the same sense as Matthew 16:18 when Jesus said, "*Upon this rock I will build my church.*" We refer to His church and only His church with the phrase meaning the church that belongs to Christ. He purchased it (Acts 20:28), gave Himself for it (Ephesians 5:25), is the head of it (Colossians 1:18), since it is His body (Ephesians 1:22,23). Surely, it is proper to refer to it as the church of Christ (Romans 16:16), the way the Holy Spirit did.

The word "church" means the called out. It refers to people who have been called by the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14), out of the power of darkness into light (First Peter 2:9). They have been delivered out of the world of sin and into Christ where there is salvation (Second Timothy 2:10; Colossians 1:13). The church is

composed of a peculiar people (Titus 2:14), who belong to the Lord. The church is the saved (Acts 2:47).

The term is used to refer to the saved in a local area or the saved throughout the world. It is never used in Scripture in the sense of a denomination. Denominations are either larger than the saved in a given area, or less than the saved throughout the world. There is no Biblical sense in which the word "church" can be used pertaining to denominationalism. There just is no kinship between the Lord's church and denominations that have come into existence from the minds and actions of men.

Other Terms

There are several descriptive terms in Scripture defining the church. As noted, the church consists of called out people, a peculiar people. It is called a kingdom when referring to its governmental features (Colossians 1:13). It is identified as the house or family of God when emphasizing its family nature (First Timothy 3:15). (The term "family" is never used with reference to simply a local church). It is called the body of Christ when stressing its relationship to Christ and the fellowship of its members (Ephesians 1:22,23; First Corinthians 12:12). Christ is the King of the kingdom. God is the Father of the family, and Christ is the elder brother and joint-heir (Romans 8:17). He is the head of the body.

The church is also revealed as the fold of Christ, who is its spiritual Shepherd, and there is one fold (John 10:16). When its worship is put forward it is called God's temple (First Corinthians 3:16). When called a vineyard, its work and service is featured (Matthew 21:28). The closeness to Christ is emphasized in Ephesians five when the church is called the bride of Christ. All of these identifications (even being an army with soldiers of the cross fighting the good fight of faith) relate different features of the church, but the same people.

What The Church Teaches

What does the church say to the world? What does it advocate before mankind? What are its principles and

plea? First Timothy 4:11, Paul told Timothy, "*These things command and teach.*" What things?

Sometimes we hear people say, "The church teaches this or that." We should be concerned with learning what the Bible teaches, and that is what the church should teach. The church is not the origin of its message, the doctrine it is to uphold (First Timothy 3:15). The Word of God is what brought the church into existence when preached on Pentecost, and that truth is what it is to proclaim. We do not speak disrespectfully but accurately when we say that one might hear most anything being taught depending on the church one has under consideration. But no man has the right to advocate or proclaim anything other than what Scripture teaches. The church has no authority of itself regarding the creation of doctrine. It is to proclaim and follow what the Word of God has authorized.

The Scriptures affirm its own verbal inspiration (Second Timothy 3:16, 17; First Corinthians 2:12,13). Whether the Scripture one is reading is prophetic, apostolic, from the Old or New Testament, the Scripture is the source of doctrine and is to be rightly divided or handled aright (Second Timothy 2:15). God gave us the Bible that we might know what we must know, be convinced, leave the wrong and follow the right. The Word of God is our "*lamp*" and guide in life. We must contend, as Scripture does, that it is the verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative, and all-sufficient Word of God.

How Deity Operates on Man

God operates on the heart of those who are in sin through the preaching and hearing of His Word. He lives and dwells with His people by and through the guidance of the Word. Man comes to believe through the Word (John 17:20; 20:31; Romans 10:17).

Ephesians 5:18 commands us to be filled with the Spirit. A parallel passage in Colossians 3:16 tells us how we obey that command. "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.*" Deity influences, leads, and guides man by His Word, not separate nor apart from it. The Word of God is the very sword the Spirit uses (Ephesians

6:17). What the Scripture ascribes to Deity in guiding and leading man is also said of the Word of God. This is because Deity uses the Word as His instrument or means of guiding and leading. We do not read of a direct operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of man to save him apart from the preaching of the Word. The Word has been revealed, written, and can be read and understood. When followed, God dwells with us.

Romans 1:16,17 teaches that the gospel is God's power unto salvation. The gospel reveals the facts, commands, and promises regarding salvation through Christ. In the gospel is the '*righteousness of God revealed*," meaning God's strategy, battle plan, scheme, and system for saving man. It refers to the way God justifies man.

Components of the Gospel

The fundamental facts of the gospel include the eternal nature of Christ, His birth by a virgin, His perfect life, His fulfillment of prophecies, His miracles and teachings, His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension into heaven. It reveals God's grace, mercy, and love for sinful humanity and what provision Deity has made on the behalf of man's salvation. It also includes His kingship as He now reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords, plus His promise to return for His own.

The commands of the gospel must be obeyed for one to be saved (Second Thessalonians 1:6-9). Inasmuch as man without Christ is lost in sin and Christ is the only Savior, each one must obey what the Lord has commanded. He commands faith, repentance, confession of faith in Him, and baptism into Him in order to be saved. Once among the redeemed we are to live lives after His pattern faithfully and loyally. We must respect and follow whatever He teaches regarding work, worship, and everything else He has revealed by His authority (Colossians 3:17).

The gospel includes many exceeding great and precious promises (Second Peter 1:4). Among them is the promise of forgiveness of sins, fellowship with Deity, and the expectation of heaven when a faithful life as a Christian has come to its conclusion.

It is tragic that the churches of men have rejected the divine command for one to be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). This baptism is a baptism in water of penitent believers. Salvation is not determined by how one feels, what one thinks, what others say or do, but by what the Scripture teaches. Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; First Peter 3:21, and many others, lead man to the inescapable conclusion that baptism is essential to salvation because the Lord made it a condition of pardon. Who has the right to set it aside? It is never presented as a work of merit by which one earns his salvation. It is rather presented as the act of obedience whereby one reaches the saving blood of Christ (Romans 6:3,4). We are baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:27). Why those of denominations have warred against what is taught is one of the wonders of the religious world.

God's Church Government

Those in the church not only advocate, preach, and teach the inspiration of the Scriptures, the power of the Word, the need to obey His commands, but it also upholds the Biblically revealed government of the church. Christ is its head (Colossians 1:18). Guided and directed by the inspired Word, the church is organized into local congregations. We never read of an organizational unit larger than a local church. Each church is overseen by elders and served by deacons (Philippians 1:1). Every member is a member of the body (First Corinthians 12). The system of government of His church is relatively simple. Is it not pathetic how men have departed from what is authorized and produced complicated and erroneous systems?

Worship

The church advocates the same worship of God as the Scripture denotes for Christians. Without going into detail in this lesson in this matter, for there are other lessons pertaining to this, we just list the items or avenues of worship the New Testament authorizes. We sing, pray, give of our means, partake of the Lord's Supper, and proclaim His Word of truth. This is that which we read from Scripture and this is that which, when done in the right spirit, is what God wants. Other

actions, regardless of how well-intentioned, are simply outside the authority of Christ and must be abandoned to be right before God.

As the Oracles

The call of those in the Lord's church is to call Bible things by Bible names, using sound speech that cannot be condemned, speaking things which become sound doctrine, speaking as the oracles of God (Titus 2:1,8; First Peter 4:11). His disciples were called Christians (Acts 11:26). Why should anyone wish to wear a religious name other than what God's Word designates? The Ashdodic language being heard in some quarters today simply betrays how those who speak have been drinking too often and too deeply from the fountains of human religions rather than from the source of pure speech.

Inasmuch as the Bible declares the necessity of living a faithful life as a Christian, being what one has professed to have become, the church sends forth the need of adding the "Christian virtues" to our characters and lives (Second Peter 1:5ff). It matters what one believes and how faithful to correct convictions he lives. How we present ourselves before God in daily life is important.

The Plea

The plea of the church today, if it be found contending for the faith once delivered (Jude 3) is to restore the religion of Christ among men, seeking unity based upon acceptance of God's truth. Christianity for our century must be the Christianity of the first century. Truth makes us free (John 8:32). There must be unity for there to be one body, Spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and God and Father (Ephesians 4:4-6). We urge people everywhere to abandon creeds, disciplines, manuals, and such like for the Word of God.

Salvation is in the body of Christ, His church. The principles and plea of the church today is as it has been since Pentecost. What saith the Word? This is our plea and the foundation of it.

* * * * *

The Future of the Church

It may seem a bit presumptuous to assume one can know what the future holds for the church as if he is a prophet. We can neither claim to be a prophet, nor, like, Amos, the son of a prophet (Amos 7:14). There have been infallible prophecies uttered in the past, however, regarding the future of the church. The Old Testament prophets foretold its coming. John the Baptist said it was "*at hand*" in his day. Jesus predicted it would come in the lifetime of some of those who heard Him speak (Mark 9:1). The apostles warned of an apostasy which history reveals did occur (Second Timothy 4:1).

We can also know that ultimately the future of the church will be eternal victory. Matthew 16:16-18 tells us the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Nothing could prevent its establishment and it shall not be destroyed. The theme of the book of Revelation is the eventual victory of the faithful in the church of the Lord. First Corinthians 15:24 speaks of the kingdom, which is the church, being delivered to the Father. But this glorious and final victory does not and will not prevent apostasy arising from time to time.

Where are the strong congregations of which we read in the New Testament? What happened to them? Have they not ceased to exist? They left the truth and fell away. We can be sure that during their good years they would not have supposed that these congregations would someday cease to exist.

Crisis and Conflict

We can be confident that the future of the church will be one of crisis and conflict. It has been that way since Pentecost. The Lord warned of such spiritual warfare and even persecution that would come from many sources against His disciples. The church is in a struggle against evil, fighting the good fight of faith in a world that loves the darkness of sin. Christ came to bring

peace between God and man, but that will not necessarily produce peace between men. There are those who will follow the Lord and those who will not. There will ever be conflict between those two. While our fight is not a carnal one (Second Corinthians 10:4), it is a warfare nonetheless.

As We Sow

We might be assisted in knowing something of the future of the church when we take notice of the unrepealable law of sowing and reaping (Galatians 6:7,8). We can learn something of the future by considering the past. The kind of seed that is sown will determine the kind of fruit produced. We know what the early church was by what it taught and what it practiced. We know what the church is today by what is taught and practiced. The church of the future will be according to what will be taught and practiced. For this reason there is a justifiable concern by faithful brethren for the future of the church with many false and denominational concepts being promoted by many in the church.

Just what is being taught? Will the church of the future have the proper respect for the authority of the Word? Is the Word being taught or laid aside for other ideas? The seed of the kingdom, which is the Word of God (Luke 8:11) only produces the Lord's church. We cannot expect to sow and tolerate the sowing of that which is contrary to Scripture and the church be as it ought to be. There must be "*sound speech*." So much that we hear from many quarters, from literature used, modern speech so-called Bibles, from college classes, publications some produce, is foreign to "*thus saith the Lord*." While many in the church have knowledge of truth and even warn of the trends that run against the truth, what of the oncoming generations as the truth is more and more set aside and the ways of men adopted? Are we so blind and hardened as to think this will not affect the future of the church, and in an adverse way?

The issue might be presented with a series of questions. Will the teaching done in the church be Bible or human theology and philosophy as taught in colleges? Will we preach the gospel or promote gimmicks? So many in the

church have obviously opted for the flashy dresser, the hurrahs, jive talk in a show of being "relevant," give away prizes, helicopter rides for attendance, trips to resorts and playgrounds, listening to the politicians, etc. Shall we have emphasis on the message or spend our time adopting the methods of those in error?

How Led?

Will the church be led by elders who know and love the Book, or by editors who want to sell papers? Shall we be influenced by gospel preachers or by modernistic professors? Will our guide be Scripture or so-called "scholarship?" Shall we alter our mission from evangelism, edification, and benevolence in favor of secular education, recreation, entertainment, and "feeling good?" Can we retain our distinctiveness or shall we drift into being just another denomination as some advocate? These are fair questions and present the problems facing the church in precise terms that will affect the future of the church.

Will we build churches or buildings? Shall we offer worship and praise or just get "high" with emotionalism, big promotions, headline contributions, and battery charges? Will the church actually progress or digress? They are not the same thing, you know!

Godly elders could and should prevent the church from falling away. But how many had rather keep "peace" with men than seek the way of the Lord?

Conviction or Convenience?

Will our faith be that of conviction of conscience by the Word or compromise and convenience? In many instances the latter seems to be prominent! Shall we convert the world or conform to the present culture? Many are trying to change God to fit the times when our task is to change the world to fit God. Bigness rather than soundness is the watchword of many. Is it not evident that some are more concerned about budget than baptisms, and looking for responses rather than conversions? Such questions need our consideration because they bring us back into the way that helps us see

where we are, and what may be more important, the direction we are going. This will have a tremendous impact on the future.

It makes a difference the direction we are going. This does not minimize the importance of where we are. Suppose you are traveling from one place to another. Where you are is obviously important. If you really wish to reach your destination, does it not matter the direction you are going? Will you reach it if you are going the wrong direction?

The analogy fits our conditions. We are on our way to heaven. At least, that is the desired destination. Where we are matters. Whether we are faithful in Christ or not makes all the difference in the world and in eternity. But what is our direction? Are going toward the goal, or are we drifting away from the path we must travel?

Quite often brethren speak of the pioneers of the Restoration Movement. Certainly, they had the right goal. They taught the right pattern, plan, and blueprint from the Scriptures. (Some deny the Bible is our pattern, but they are apostates and heretics, no longer believing what the Bible teaches about His church). Those of yesteryear demonstrated a noble spirit. But they are not now, nor have ever been, the authority. No faithful gospel preacher ever cites them as authority. They advocated what Peter demanded in First Peter 4:11 about speaking as the oracles of God. They had the Word and had the right attitude toward it as the Word of God. They sought unity based on truth, not mere union and "unity in diversity." They were not willing to negotiate, compromise, or bend with current events. We need more of that disposition today if the future of the church is to be acceptable to God.

Not All

Not all that is called "churches of Christ" are really what they are called. We have long known that the term "church of God" is a correct term to identify God's people. But it takes more than just the name, even though the right name is important, to be right with God. Too many have become tolerant of sin, without

discipline, winking at theistic evolution, premillennialism, working of miracles today, claiming the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, practicing worldliness, fellowshiping the unbaptized, even offering to forget differences and seeking fellowship in spite of grave and incompatible doctrinal differences. This "love me, but leave me alone to do my thing" attitude of many makes them suspect that they are no longer "churches of Christ" although they may have such a sign in front of their meeting house. Churches can be rich, but not righteous. They may have great size, but also great sin and error. The phrase, "*a glorious church*," does not properly identify many congregations that choose to wear the Lord's name. They have been overcome by more digression than they admit.

Apostasy is never more than one generation away unless the church is properly taught and its work properly authorized. Many who love the truth and the church as the New Testament teaches have warned that there is emerging from our number a new denomination, using gimmicks and methods of false religions, promoting their erroneous views through modern versions, being led by those who are determined to restructure the church to a fashion more acceptable to the religious world and our sinful culture. Such is the case with the new Jubilee Church springing from Nashville, Tennessee, and those under the influence of the Tulsa Workshop, and the so-called "Christian Colleges" with their know-it-all professors, who know more about the theologies of unbelievers than they do about the Word of God. The false doctrines and concepts are being endorsed and promoted through papers (Wineskins, Image), schools (DLU, ACU, etc.) and other means such as big extravaganzas like Jubilee, etc.

Preach the Word

The only way to assure the future of the church to be acceptable to God is to preach the Word, know the Word, practice the Word, not go beyond the Word, demand authority from the Word. The church of the future will be composed of different people than the church today. Time and death will see to that. Will those people believe and practice what is taught in the Bible? They will not

likely do so if they are not taught the Bible as the Bible is. Trends that take people away from the paths of righteousness develop slowly until they seemingly jump to a fast pace, as is now apparent. Step by step, rather than by gigantic leaps, there is a very noticeable revolution that comes on the scene. There must be a constant measuring of ourselves, not by ourselves, but by the divine standard, with the resolve to adhere to that standard. Otherwise, the future of the church will be bleak and disastrous, and the present congregations will become like the congregations we note in the New Testament that no longer exist as a churches of Christ.

We can know what THE church will be like in the coming century. TiHE church will be like THE church of the first century. Just what everyone who claims to be a member of the church may be like is impossible to know at this point in time.

The church ultimately shall see God in His glory if those who compose it will remain faithful to the Lord, walk in the light as He is in the light, maintain their fellowship with Deity by obedience to the commands of Deity. If members of the church will live lives as Scripture requires, their future is already promised, and the outlook is wonderful. Then the future of the church will be bright and blessed. This is what we must assure for oncoming geneations by standing firm in the faith, wielding the sword of the Spirit in all matters.

There may well be days of suffering as we do this. Ridicule is already a common reality. Hearing the things the Word calls sacred and holy blasphemed by the renegades of Satan are heard all around. There may even be physical persecution as in days past. But keep in mind the inspired words of Paul in Romans 8:18, *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."*

* * * * *

What have you done today to show you love God?

I Am Just A Little Surprised

Among the efforts being made to preach the gospel in the county where I live , several congregations have banded into a radio work where each congregation involved assumes responsibility for the program a regularly designated week each month. East End is one of those involved and I do the preaching when our turn comes around. This provides for us five fifteen minute programs each month for each congregation. It has worked our splendidly and sound doctrine is heard every week.

For two months I kept after denomination clergymen and members to please provide for me the passage that teaches salvation by faith only. I told them I already believed salvation by faith, but wanted that passage that teaches what they teach. I really begged them to prove the false doctrine they uphold.

I was surprised that nobody, NOBODY ever tried to present the verse I requested. Of course, I know why. It is not in the Bible. But why, then, do they teach it? Is that honest? JB

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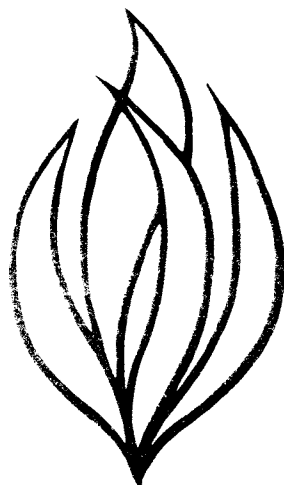
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*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*



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Why Persecutest Thou Me?

NUMBER ONE

As Saul of Tarsus was on his way toward Damascus to continue making havoc of the church, *"suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven, and he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who are thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks."* (Acts 9:3-5).

As persecution was being leveled against the church, Christ said that it was against Him. The head of the church, Jesus Christ, was One who was *"despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."* (Isaiah 53:3). His enemies pursued Him, pushed, maligned, persecuted, harassed, seeking constantly to ensnare Him in His words, even seeking to throw Him over a cliff, ever revealing their intense animosity and hatred toward Him.

"Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him..." (John 15:8). *"This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him."* (John 8:6). *"Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk."* (Matthew 22:15).

His opponents were not satisfied until He *"yielded up the ghost."* (Matthew 27:50). He was hated with an unparalleled hatred, and was the subject of vindictive bitterness and cruelty toward Him. Why? Why was the Son of God so despised? As Pilate asked, *"Why, what evil hath he done?"* (Matthew 27:23).

The hatred against Jesus ceased not with His death, but was transferred to His apostles and other disciples. Persecution followed His innocent, humble, unoffensive disciples. The hatred for the Master was turned against His servants. The choice that was often given to Christians was, "Renounce Christ, or be put to death!"

The only crime of which they were accused was being a Christian. Again, we ask, why was this?

His Personal Suffering

In this first part of our three part study we will focus attention on Jesus and the persecution He personally suffered while He lived in Palestine. There were several sects of the Jews, Pharisees, Saducees, Herodians, Libertines, Zealots, Essenes (the last not specifically mentioned in Scripture). They were political, religious, economic factions and parties. They had great rivalry and hatred one against the other. But in Jesus they found a common foe. They were willing to set aside their doctrinal, philosophical, economic, and ambitious disputes and differences to join together in opposing Jesus. As Paul was informed, Acts 28:22, concerning the church some years later, *"we know that every where it is spoken against."*

Not All Hated Him

The hatred against Jesus was not shared by everyone at first. The general masses of people loved Christ rather than hating Him. They thronged about Him, followed Him everywhere, listening to Him, receiving the blessings He bestowed. They gave God thanks that such a One was among them.

But there was another element that was smaller, but powerful and very influential. They were the priests, rabbis, scribes, the leaders of the people. While they had anticipated the coming of a Messiah and a king, when Jesus came He did not fit their preconceived notions. He was not rich, had no military force, was not intending to drive out the Roman armies, did not wear decorative robes, did not display a public piety and show, did not engage in long prayers, rituals, and traditions. He was not one of them but was in contrast to them. Rather, He rebuked them, severely, sharply, repeatedly because of their sins.

"Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat; all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe

and do; but do not after their works, for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men. They make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogue, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi." (Matthew 23:1-7). This kind of teaching did not set well with those of prominence and in positions of prestige and power.

Hear Him again. Matthew 23:13-15, "*But woe unto you, scribes, 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. Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widow's houses, and for a pretence make long prayers: therefore, ye shall receive the greater damnation. Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.*" Here we begin to discover why Jesus was persecuted. They did not believe Him because He dared to tell them the truth regarding them and their sorry spiritual state.

The Lord's Answer

At this point please take your New Testament, laying aside the lesson, and read Matthew 23:16-26, noting the sharpness and directness of the words of our Lord against wicked men. There you will find the basis for the hatred against Him. His condemnation of evil caused the guilty to smart and chafe under His perception of them and His indictment of their evil works of darkness and pretense. There were repeated confrontations between Jesus and these people.

Turn once again and read Matthew 23:27-36, and ask yourself, "Is this from the Lord of love?" Yes, Jesus is the Lord of love, and also the Ruler of righteousness. To love the good demands a hatred of the evil. Jesus' teaching insulted the pseudo-dignity and pretended sincerity of these hypocrites. He offended their pride and exposed their iniquities. As a result, He received their

contempt, hatred, bitterness, and became the object and target of their plots, schemes, and designs to harm Him.

Jesus Was Offensive?

He offended not only the rabbis, priests, scribes, etc. but also those of popularity and riches. Mark 12:41-44, *"And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and man that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in than all they which have cast into the treasury. For all they did cast in of their abundance, but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living."*

Jesus did not cater to the rich, extol their wealth, flatter them, as they were accustomed to being treated. Rather He commended the sacrificial poor. When He told the story of Lazarus and the rich man this was offensive to those who were covetous and greedy and who trusted in their wealth.

Jesus taught, *"Ye cannot serve God and mammon."* (Matthew 6:24). *"A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."* (Luke 12:15). To the rich man the Lord said, *"Thou fool."* (Luke 12:20). He taught that there was a vast difference between physical prosperity and success and spiritual prosperity and success. This offended those who measured their worth in terms of physical wealth.

The procedures and manners of Jesus would not be considered wise and diplomatic today. They would even be termed indiscreet if not altogether out of line. People have become accustomed to so much soft-soap and the Dale Carnegie approach to preaching that they actually think that men know more how to present God's truth than Jesus did. So many today play up to the monied and powerful, regardless of what kind of people they are or how contrary to God's will they are in life.

Some Still Received Him

But even though Jesus was offending these “notables,” the multitude did not turn away from Him until much later. They still sought Him. When Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem at the beginning of the last week of His life before His crucifixion, He was received by the multitudes with great enthusiasm. Matthew 21:8-11, “*And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.*” The people rejoiced to see Him.

But soon their attitude completely changed. To be sure, the leaders exerted influence on them, but there was another reason that these who shouted His praises were soon to be heard crying, “*Crucify Him! Crucify Him!*” What changed their attitude?

Why They Persecuted Him

It was because Jesus also condemned the sins of the people as much as He did the sins of the prominent. Matthew 21:12,13, “*And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money changers, and the seats of them that sold doves. And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves.*”

In Matthew twenty-four He warned of the wickedness of the people of Jerusalem, that city that had a dreary history of persecuting God's prophets that had been sent unto her. He foretold its destruction, and even the destruction of the temple. These words, like the other “*hard saying*” of Jesus caused many to turn away from Him. Once, when some were leaving Him, He asked His disciples, “*Will ye also go away?*” Peter responded, “*To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*” (John 6:67,68). The hearts of the masses were offended and became willing pawns in the hands of Jesus' enemies among the leaders, and were used to promote

the unscrupulous designs of those who called for His death when He stood before Pilate.

Their hatred was climaxed when Jesus was condemned, led to Calvary, and crucified, even as people cried "*His blood be on us, and on our children.*" (Matthew 27:25). Paul once asked brethren in Galatia, "*Am I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?*" If Jesus had asked that question the answer would be a resounding, "YES!"

One has written, "John the Baptist's message from the wilderness was not 'Smile, God loves you.' It was, '*O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee the wrath to come?*' Jeremiah was not put into a miry pit for preaching, 'I'm OK, you're OK.' It was for crying out against adultery, idolatry, and other wickedness of his nation. Noah's message from the steps of the ark was not, 'Something good is going to happen to you.' He condemned the world and was a preacher of righteousness. Jesus Christ was not crucified for saying, '*Consider the lilies, how they grow,*' but for saying, '*Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites... child of hell... fools and blind guides... whited sepulchers... generation of vipers.*'"

We read a poem that said in part:

Don't be negative, said some to me.

But they were as negative as could be.

Don't be negative, was their constant cry,

But from the cross I heard Jesus sigh:

'Twas not sweet positive truth I taught

That caused my painful death to be wrought.

It was exposure of error, lust and greed,

That prompted my enemies to plot the deed.

Jesus was not persecuted because He healed others, raised the dead, offered hope and salvation. It was

because He dared to condemn sin. John 3:19-21, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be proved." Matthew 23:37,38, "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 wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." Notice the willingness of Jesus to save, but, "ye would not."

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Why Persecutest Thou Me?

NUMBER TWO

Having considered the persecution of Christ personally, and discovering why He was persecuted, we now turn our attention to the persecution that was suffered by the early church. We want to learn why there was such hatred directed toward the apostles and the early disciples.

The apostles and early Christians were warned by Christ and by each other to expect persecution. John 15:18-20, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world, would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep your's also." First John 3:13, "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you." First Peter 4:12-16, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall

be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed: but let him glorify God on this behalf." Matthew 5:11,12, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." They were forewarned.

How They Did Suffer

And suffer they did! First Corinthians 15:30,31, "*And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.*" The sufferings of Paul are listed in Second Corinthians 11:23-28. The church in Pergamos knew persecution and one of their members, Antipas, was martyred for the cause of Christ. Peter was imprisoned. James was beheaded. Stephen was stoned. The church was known as a sect spoken against everywhere (Acts 28:22). Those who preached the saving gospel were driven from city to city. Men and women were bound because they followed "*that way.*" Many made havoc of the church even thinking they were rendering God a service. And we wonder why this happened! What evil had they done?

Expectation and Concern of the Jews

Among the Jews there was an expectation of the coming King and Messiah. These expectations were heightened by the preaching of John the Baptist. The prophets of old had foretold of His coming. Pretenders had arisen from time to time, only to be exposed and often executed. There were those physical rebels against Rome who temporarily attracted a following. Because many had come and passed away, people were suspicious and on guard against any who claimed to be the Messiah. When Jesus appeared, having the prophesied credentials, the people still did not recognize Him for who He was. They

tended to set Jesus alongside all the others that had come, and thought His death would terminate His influence just as had been done concerning others.

But the enemies of Christ did become concerned after His crucifixion and His promise of the resurrection haunted them. They, with Roman permission, took measures to assure nothing could happen that could be considered a resurrection. His tomb was guarded. Yet, He arose.

After His death, burial, and resurrection there came forth a new and powerful element in society. Men began preaching Christ and His resurrection, declaring Him to be both "*Lord and Christ.*" Their preaching was not done in some distant land, nor after a long span of time after the event, but in the same city where Jesus had died, and only fifty days after His crucifixion. They cited how Jesus fulfilled the prophecies; how many had seen the risen Lord; that they were witnesses of His resurrection; that He had ascended into heaven; that He was reigning as King. They stressed how openly these things had been done, and that it was not done '*in a corner,*' and confirmed their message by performing miracles.

Thousands heard the message of truth preached in His name. Three thousand heard, believed, and obeyed on the day of Pentecost, the day of the establishment of the Lord's kingdom, which is the church. Being baptized and added to the church, they banded together as brothers and sisters in Christ, children of God, the saved through Christ, and they were a distinct body. The church of Christ was a reality. They dared to be different and distinctive in their devotion to Christ. Now we begin to see why they were despised by others who rejected Christ, and who had led the way in persecuting Christ.

The Church Grew

But the early church proved to be a formidable and persuasive element. The early church grew from three thousand to five thousand men, not counting men and younger people. Multitudes were recorded as being converted, even many priests and former unbelievers. The new faith threatened the Jewish religion and the religious and political control Jewish leaders held over

the masses. The church could not be brushed aside and ignored. It demanded, and received, attention.

Beginning among the Jews, later the Gentiles were included because the salvation that Christ offered was for those of every nation (Acts 10:34,35). It soon became apparent to all that this was not just another Jewish sect, but a new faith, a new religion, a new way of life with a new King.

First, the Jews

The first persecution against the church came from Jews who felt their system was threatened. But even though Jesus was a Jew, and the first disciples were Jews, this was not a national faith but a universal faith. It challenged everything that existed or had gone before it.

The message and claims of the early church were affirmative, positive, negative, inclusive, exclusive, distinctive, certain, and without compromise. They proclaimed a faith of absolute authority. It was of divine authority (Matthew 28:18). Jesus had taught He was the only way (John 14:6). Peter preached the same truth (Acts 4:12). Jesus had said there would be one fold and one shepherd (John 10:16). He was the "*only Potentate, the King of kings, the Lord of lords.*" (First Timothy 6:15).

They declared that Christ was the "*end of the law*" (Romans 10:4). This meant that He was the goal of the law of Moses, that toward which the law pointed (Galatians 3:24,25). Now that Christ had come the law of Moses was no longer authoritative and operative for anyone, even the Jews to whom it had been exclusively given. It was taken out of the way at the cross of Christ (Colossians 2:14; Hebrews 10:9). He did not destroy it. If He had destroyed it, He could not have fulfilled it. But He did fulfill it (Matthew 5:17,18), and Paul says He abolished it (Ephesians 2:15).

Furthermore, none could be saved by that law (Galatians 2:16; Romans 3:20). This did not mean there was no law at all to which people are accountable. But none are accountable to the law of Moses. Christ brought in a better hope and a better covenant (Hebrews 7:19). There

was a change of priesthood as well as a change of law (Hebrews 7:12).

Their declarations of the gospel were exclusive in the extreme. There was one way and no other. This was not something alongside other systems. This was not something that was just as good as some other way. One would be saved this way or not be saved at all. This exclusiveness offended many who relied on other ways to please God, and they exhibited their animosity toward this teaching by persecuting the teachers of it and those that believed and followed it.

Then, the Gentiles

But the religion of Christ was not only offensive to the Jews. The pagan and false heathen religions took offense as well. Where the gospel was preached and believed, pagan temples became desolate, people burned their books of curious arts, idol makers lost their income (Acts 19). As the message of the one true and living God was spread abroad (First Thessalonians 1:9), people learned of God's wrath toward those that would not obey the gospel (Second Thessalonians 1). They learned that their pagan gods were not gods at all. And those who preached these truths were subjected to vicious, rash, and ruthless persecution at the hands of the Gentile, heathen, and pagan world, from the worshippers of Diana to the worshippers of the Roman emperor.

Furthermore, we see that the early church did not tolerate fraternity and fellowship with the sinful, lascivious, and sensual world. Nor did they extend fellowship to other religions. There is no record of the early disciples inviting Jewish rabbis to hold joint worship services with them, or inviting pagan priests to fellowship with them or take part in their worship. We read of no interfaith brotherhood. Rather we read, Ephesians 5:11, "*And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*" Second John 9-11, a passage that many in the church today must think has been lifted from the Bible, "*Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ hath both the Father and the Son. 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 God speed is a partaker of his evil deed." Romans 6:1,2. "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid! How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" Read Second Corinthians 6:14ff and heed divine teaching regarding fellowship with error. This is what the early church heard and lived after being taught. How much our brotherhood needs this message today!

Same For All

Salvation was for all and was extended to all, but on the same terms (Acts 10:34,35; Mark 16:15,16; Matthew 28:18-20). Nor was there any compromising, negotiating, or "dialoging" in order to simply "get together" with those who persisted in their human religions. Rather, the early church taught that people are lost in sin, cannot save themselves, need a Savior, that God has provided a Savior, and the Savior is Jesus Christ, and He is the only Savior, salvation is in Him and His church and cannot be enjoyed otherwise. They taught the terms of entrance into Christ and His body, the church. They taught faith, repentance, confession of faith in Christ, and baptism for the remission of sins. They taught the necessity of a life of purity, morality righteousness, work and worship as children of God in Christ. They did not teach there were saved people in human religious organizations. They did not teach salvation for those who had come to Christ but who lived and worshipped in error.

Just as the proclamation of truth caused Jesus to be unpopular, when His disciples went forward with those same truths, it provoked hatred and persecution against them as it had done against Jesus. Sadly, many never even seriously considered the gospel truth. Some, in their sophistication and self-inflated egotism and superiority, cast aside the truth and those that taught it as being unworthy of their consideration.

Paul once asked the brethren of Galatia, "*Am I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?*" The answer to Paul was, "YES!" The answer to Jesus was, "YES!" The

answer to the early church was another, "YES!" The paths of the early disciples were stained with their blood. But they persisted and upheld the faith by holding firm to the promises of God and His assurance of reward and ultimate victory to those that overcome and remain faithful.

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Why Persecutest Thou Me?

NUMBER THREE

Having now observed in the first two parts the persecution received by Jesus during His earthly ministry, and the persecution of the early church, we now concern ourselves with the church today and persecution. Christianity is still unwanted, unpopular, and the object of great enmity and hostility today. In some areas the opposition is as intense as it was in years of the first century. It seems that nothing is so generally rejected and despised as pure, simple, undenominational, Biblical, true, New Testament Christianity. A person can go forward preaching superstitions, spiritualism, denominationalism, Oriental paganism, cults, modernism, humanism, the "new morality," communism, socialism, free love, almost anything and everything and it will enjoy a following and be allowed to pursue its goals without much opposition. But nothing excites hatred against people as much as the hatred toward those who would contend for "*thus saith the Lord.*" Our nation gloats over bashing Christianity today, 1993.

Even though division exists among the numerous sects and denominational bodies, and they will clash and war one against the other, blasting each other without mercy, they get together and form a common bond in their opposition to the presentation of what the Scriptures teach regarding the religion of Christ. In

some cases, the opposition has become physical and violent.

Tolerant of Whom?

Why is it that some will contend that honesty and sincerity is sufficient regardless of what you believe, but will not apply the same standard toward those of the churches of Christ? Somehow members of the church are not to be included in this "tolerant" spirit. Some will preach that it really does not matter what you believe and practice, but if you believe and practice what churches of Christ believe and practice you are automatically shunned and become something unworthy of being tolerated. Some contend that whatever you want to follow ought to be allowed, unless you want to follow nothing but the Scriptures. The doctrine of salvation by grace alone, or salvation by faith only is applied to anyone except those who are members of churches of Christ. That "comforting" doctrine does not fit them. Why is that? Some say it does not matter to which church you belong, just so long as it is not the church of Christ. This is not an imagined condition nor does it reflect a "martyr complex." It is a reality. In fact, the reality of it has caused many who were once in the church to leave the church and pursue a path to be acceptable, or try to make the church more acceptable to those who reject the church because it stands for Biblical truth. Some even surrender and compromise truth to "get along" with everybody.

Christ and His church, in the past and the present, are objects of opposition because of the inclusive, exclusive, distinctive nature, and character of Christ and His church. The Lord's church is not just another denomination among denominations. The Bible speaks of no denomination nor offers any authority for the existence of a denomination that has, does, or ever shall exist. The faith of Christ is not just **A** system, it is **THE** system. It not just **A** church, but **THE** church. Christ is not simply **A** savior, but the **ONLY** savior. What is upheld is not something just nearest the truth, but what **IS** the truth. There are those who want everything to be fuzzy, gray, and without distinction. But the will of

Christ, which the church is to uphold (1 Timothy 3:15), does not fit in that mold.

This thing of “being nearest the truth” is an absurdity. How can one know what may be “nearest the truth” unless they know what the truth is? And if one knows what the truth is, why be content with something that is simply “nearest the truth?” Why not insist on the truth? Why be satisfied with following something other than the truth? What is wrong with contending for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3)?

Attacks Because of Hypocrisy

Some reject the church because there are members of the church who fail to live up to the doctrine of Christ. This is a criticism that is too often found to be true. But it is a criticism that could probably be leveled at any religious group of people. The cause of Christ is wounded and hindered by those who profess to be Christians who live more after the ways of the world than the way of Christ. But regardless of how inconsistent and/or hypocritical some members of the church may be, (and there is no defense for it), that does not alter the truth of Christ in the slightest. The truth is not determined by what people may or may not do, but according to what the Lord has revealed to be true in His Word, the Bible. It will stand even if all who profess to be Christians fall flat.

Why the Church is Persecuted

The church today that is faithful to the Lord faces opposition and persecution because of its exclusive creed, that which is believed. The faith of the Christian is in the “*only begotten Son of God*.” His will is the standard, and that will is revealed in the inerrant, infallible, inspired, authoritative, and all-sufficient Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17). It is that will by which we shall be judged (John 12:48), and there is no allowance for diversion from it (Galatians 1:6-9).

This contention is offensive to those who subscribe to disciplines, manuals, prayer books, catechisms, confessionals, councils, popes, conferences, conventions, feelings, etc. This offends those who want to also

embrace the books of Mormonism, the Koran, Watchtower, and other so-called "latter-day-revelations" composed and compiled by uninspired human beings and contain messages contradictory to the Bible. The plea for the Bible as the sole authority offends those who claim a direct operation of the Holy Spirit, who wish to be governed by their subjective and emotional feelings, or other standards of men. There is no love in the hearts of those who want additional authorities for the contention that there is the one authority, the Bible.

The Bible claims to be the Word of God, and forbids anything other than the Word of God. If it is the Word of God, this excludes all other measures and standards men promote. If it is not the Word of God, it propagates lies and is not deserving of being followed at all.

The Plea For Unity

The Lord's church that is faithful to the truth opposes sectarianism, partyism, denominationalism, heathenism, hobbyism, humanism, etc. that is so dominant in the religious world. The Lord's church pleads for unity based on the truth of the Scriptures, upholding one body (Ephesians 4:4,5), preaching there is one fold and one shepherd (John 10:16), which demands we follow the same rule (First Corinthians 1:10; Philipplians 1:27).

While the Lord's church preaches that the gospel is for all, it also preaches that all can be saved but only on the same terms. Mankind is not allowed to choose whatever he wishes with equal benefit. Biblical teaching and the demand that mankind observe Biblical authority is too narrow for many, especially those who want to include what God has excluded, and those who defend division, sectarianism, denominationalism, and the new craze, "unity in diversity." Some have falsely preached that there are Christians in all the denominations. How can that be when most denominations do not ever teach God's plan of salvation? It is not sectarian to stand for one church, the one plan of salvation, the sole authority of the Bible, and other distinctive points of truth the church is obligated to uphold. Some, evidently becoming weary of standing for the truth, being desirous of being

more acceptable to the nations round about that do not follow the truth, and have decided to let down the truth and its claims in order to leave the lines that God has drawn in a mushy, fuzzy, unclear haze.

If one is determined to stand for what the Scriptures teach, he becomes the target of the divided, chaotic, confused religious world even those in the church who have compromised and weakened before that persecution. Nothing brings people in religion together like the banding together to defend the ways of men against the way of God. Too many are like the Jewish sects of the first century who had a zeal, but not according to knowledge, intent on their own way in preference to God's way (Romans 10:1-3). How they could battle each other, but get together to battle Christ!

We Must Continue

The church that is faithful to God will continue to uphold the gospel even as it contradicts and violates the theological theories, philosophies, worldly practices, and sinful manners of the twisted religious world and the anti-God people around us. It is a noteworthy comment that was written many years ago by an older gospel preacher named Benjamin Franklin, recorded in the book, The Gospel Preacher, Volume 2, page 291.

"The Church of the living God does not stand on a succession of popes, clergy, ordinances, officers of churches; but on the same God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the God of the prophets; the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, above all, through all and in all; one Lord Jesus the Christ, in whom dwells all the fullness of the Deity substantially; the resurrection and the life; Head over all things to the Church, and blessed forever and ever; one Eternal Spirit; the Spirit of all truth and all revelation; one book, the Bible; one gospel, the gospel of Christ and the teaching of Christ and the apostles; in one word, on having everything the first Church had, being everything it was, and hoping for all that was promised to it. If it believes the same the first Church did, practices the same, and hopes for the same, and believes it; has the same commands and obeys them; has the same promises and hope for them, it has the same

faith, and obedience and hope; if it has precisely the same book, and follows it, unquestionably, it is the same Church" (Emphasis, BF).

This is offensive to those who want and seek something other than this. Various measures are used to suppress the efforts to proclaim the everlasting truth. Often, without fair inquiry, but from prejudice and self-will, there is opposition, rejection, dismissal, persecution, and humiliation directed toward one and all who hold these truths to be without Biblical refutation.

Paul once asked his brethren of Galatia, "*Am I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?*" If Jesus asked that question, the answer would be a resounding, YES. If the early church asked that question, the answer would be, YES. If the present faithful in the church asks that question, again, the answer is, YES. Men love darkness rather than light (John 3:19-21). Those who follow the light will suffer because of it. Second Timothy 3:12, "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*"

Nonetheless our hope is stayed in Christ. He said, "*Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*" (Matthew 5:10-12). Paul wrote, "*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*" (Romans 8:18).

* * * * *

Makes you wonder: Why do some, who once were faithful to God but now adopt the new liberalism, act as if they are ashamed of the identification the Holy Spirit gave the Lord's church, "*churches of Christ?*" (Romans 16:16). Why be ashamed of anything Deity has said? JB

Was Peter the First Pope?

Most Bible students already know the right answer to the title question, but all do not know the reasons for the right answer. Whenever there is a death of the reigning Catholic pope the news media will speak repeatedly of the event, and refer to the apostle Peter as the first pope. One commentator said at one death of a pope that the church was without a head until another pope was selected. The Catholic Church was without a head, but not the church of Christ, the church of which we read in the Bible. We stoutly dispute the idea that Peter was a pope at all, or that the Bible teaches anything about such an office. The Lord's church is never without its Head. But one's attitude toward the papacy ultimately depends on the extent of respect one has for the Scriptures.

The office of a pope does not exist by the authority of the Bible. Second Timothy 3:16,17 affirms the all-sufficiency of the Scriptures, and it says nothing of such a position. Actually, the papacy exists as a result of the gradual evolution of apostasy beginning specifically with a falling away from the governmental arrangement of the church as taught in the Bible.

After much rivalry for years among those who already digressed from God's pattern and the development of certain "bishops," there emerged the boastful claim by John the Faster of Constantinople that he was universal bishop. Gregory the Great of Rome openly denounced such a claim as presumptuous, arrogant, and going far beyond the realm of acceptance by others. It is somewhat surprising that one who called himself the "bishop of Rome" would rebuke the use of such a title as the Universal Pope, but later his successor, Boniface of Rome, assumed the very title Gregory had denounced as sinful presumption. With military assistance of the Roman Emperor named Phocas, Boniface was able to make his claim stick where John the Faster was forced to back down. The year was 606 A.D., nearly six hundred

years after the Lord's church has been established on Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2). Who believes the church was without a head for six centuries?

Christ is Head

The Bible teaches that Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22,23; Colossians 1:18). The church does not have two heads, one on earth and one in heaven. If anyone ever asks you where the headquarters of the church of Christ is, tell them it is where the head is, and that is heaven. It is not Rome, Boston, London, Salt Lake City, Mecca, Abilene, or Nashville. The death of no man leaves the Lord's church without a head.

The titles that are assumed, not only by the pope but many clergymen of many religions, are in violation of the spirit and letter of the teaching of Christ. Matthew 23:8-10, *"But be not ye called Rabbi. for one is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth, for one is your Father which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters, for one is your Master, even Christ."* It seems that both Protestant and Catholic clergymen have either never read, or just pay no attention to, these explicit words from the Son of God. They parade about wearing their specially designed titles to show themselves to be "somewhat."

Peter Disallowed Worship

Peter would not even allow himself to be worshipped, such as the time of his visit to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10: 24-26). What a contrast with that which the popes not only accept but require from their followers! This contrast is too glaring for honest people to ignore.

Foundation is Christ

The church was not built on Peter, as Romanists claim, but on Christ. Matthew 16:16-18 teaches that Christ is not only the builder of the church but the foundation of the church, and that foundation is the truth of the confession made by Peter and recorded in Matthew, *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."* Christ is the Rock upon which the church was built, not Peter.

The word translated "rock" that refers to the foundation of the church is the word "petra," feminine gender, and means a mass of stone, a solid ledge of rock. The word translated "Peter" is the word "petros," a masculine word, and refers to a mere pebble that can be easily tossed. Rather than calling Peter the rock upon which the church was built, even though the word Peter means stone, Jesus is showing a tremendous contrast between Peter and the foundation of the church so that ought not be any confusion whatsoever as to the foundation of the church. Paul clears up any misconceptions anybody could have when he wrote First Corinthians 3:11, *"For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus."*

We do well to listen to the inspired words of Peter himself, First Peter 2:4-8, *"To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious. Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Christ Jesus. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious; but unto them which disbelieve, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner. And a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient, whereunto also they were appointed."* Peter knew who was the foundation of the church, the rock, upon which all else rests. Why cannot others also understand it as he did except they are wedded to their traditions of men more than the truth of God?

Isaiah 28:16 and Psalm 118:22 contain the very same statement to which Peter referred, but even more significantly, Jesus cited the same passage (Matthew 21:42), and made application of it to Himself. Jesus knew He was the Rock of the foundation and said so. Why do men have such trouble with this except they do not accept His word?

Prominence, but Not Primacy

Much is made by some of the prominence of Peter. No Bible student denies the prominence of Peter in the New Testament record and that he was an outstanding apostle. Nobody of right mind would demean that great man. But we dare not confuse his prominence with primacy. Peter called himself "*servant*" (First Peter 1:1), an "*elder*" like others (First Peter 5:1). The power granted unto him (Matthew 16:19) was also granted to all the other apostles (Matthew 18:18). All were given the power to forgive sins in the sense of proclaiming the conditions upon which God would forgive the sins of men. He never claimed the power of forgiveness to himself, but rather taught Simon to "*pray God*" to be forgiven (Acts 8:22). We wonder why Peter, if he served as pope as Catholics claim, he did not simply say, "I absolve thee?" We can illustrate the relationship of Peter and the other apostles to be much like that which abides with senators in the United States Senate (no offense to the apostles intended). Some are more prominent and influential than others. But they sustain equal rank and authority and none has but one vote, and none has the primacy over the others.

Peter Was Married

Peter was not qualified to be a pope according to the qualifications the Romanists have for a pope because Peter was married (First Corinthians 9:5). Matthew 8:14 says he had a mother-in-law. You do not have one unless you are married. Catholics claim Peter left his wife once he became pope, but we wonder what kind of apostle of Christ would he be if he violated God's law concerning marriage, putting asunder what God had joined together.

Can't Get Peter in Rome

The facts are that there is no Biblical evidence that Peter was ever in Rome. He evidently was not there when Paul wrote the letter to the Romans. Even though Paul addressed many brethren, sent greetings to many, is it not strange that he would not even say "hello" to the pope? It was not until the year 354 A.D. that it was styled that Peter was the "bishop of Rome." The entire idea rests on human doctrines and traditions, not history and Bible. Keep in mind that the Biblical form of

government is a plurality of elders or bishops having the oversight of one congregation, not one "bishop" governing many congregations.

Some have speculated that Babylon (First Peter 5:13) refers to Rome. But there is no reason to draw that conclusion except some are so desperate to get Peter to Rome even if they have to change cities.

Nobody Else Thought He Was Pope

The other apostles did not consider Peter to hold a superior rank and authority over them. Paul rebuked him to the face in Galatians 2:11-13. When he wanted to know the truth about circumcision he did not have to go ask Peter. At the meeting where circumcision was discussed in Jerusalem (Acts 15), the one who presided was James, not Peter. The summary and concluding remarks were by James, not Peter. None ever referred to Peter as pope nor indicated any recognition of primacy among them. The Holy Spirit was promised to all of them, not just Peter (John 14,15,16). The fact that his name is often listed first proves nothing because his name is not first in Galatians 2:9. Some say Christ told him, "*Feed my sheep.*" But this was the work of them all. Remember that Peter was the one reported to have denied Him three times. Little wonder he was charged three times with giving needed strength to the church. The same admonition was given to Paul and the elders. Matthew 20:25,26 records a time when two other apostles requested places of primacy and were denied. Jesus said it was not to be so among the apostles. How dare some come along later and say the Lord was wrong about it, and then make Peter top man!

Paul said he was not one whit behind the chiefest apostles (Second Corinthians 11:5; 12:11). That does not harmonize with one of them having primacy over the rest of them.

The Popes Are Unqualified

The qualifications for an apostle make it impossible that there could be successors to them. Apostles were to have been eye witnesses and ear witnesses of Christ

resurrected. They had the power of miracles. They were baptized in the Holy Spirit, even having power to lay hands on others and bestowing upon them the power to perform miracles. They were guided infallibly in the things they taught and revealed. These things are not possessed or possible by anyone living today. Those who claim to succeed apostles or be apostles today simply do not respect what Scripture teaches on the subject. This applies to any church, any man, anywhere, even the apostates in Nashville, Tennessee who claim to be apostles. They do not know the difference between apostles and apostates. They are the later.

What more need to be said to show that Peter was never a pope? The Bible knows nothing of such an office, and that alone is sufficient to disprove it is of God. Even if one could prove the office was authorized of God, he could never prove it was occupied by the apostle Peter. The whole papal system resulted from an apostasy from the truth, not adherence to it.

* * * * *

THE QUESTION GOES UNANSWERED

Now and again I receive an irate letter from those who oppose churches supporting orphan homes. They list a vast amount of irrelevant material and demand that you spend your time and energy answering them on a wide variety of differences. They act like, especially among some of the younger ones, that the subject is brand new and that these issues have never been discussed.

I am willing to accommodate them provided they answer me one thing. This I require they answer first before I waste a lot of time dealing with their objections. I ask them to show me how anybody, individual, church, anybody can provide for a homeless person without an institution other than a church. Of course, it takes a home, and the church is not designed to be a home. A home it absolutely essential.

They are so opposed to a home, or demand a certain kind of home, they never answer me on that. JWB

Why Make Up Lies About the Defenders of the KJV?

Some who attack defenders of the King James Version just lie, lie, lie. A West Tennessee church which has done a backflip sent out an article loaded with misrepresentations of those who defended the KJV. Who ever assumed denominations were caused by the KJV? Who ever said the KJV was never revised? Who ever said the KJV was always respected?

Who ever denied false teachers quote the KJV? But you have to twist and wrest it to get false doctrines from it. These new things include error right in the text. If "baptize" is such an evil word, when do the modern guys quit using it? They use it in the same bulletins where they denounce it. Who ever said the whole world uses or should use the KJV? Show the difference in text that alters the doctrine of Christ? Why do these people erect "straw men," make false charges, and lie? Is that the way they do things? Honesty would improve their conduct! But don't expect it! JB

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.

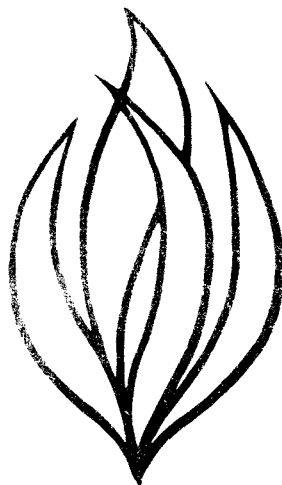
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A Burning Fire



*"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 Church: Lost and Found

Jeremiah 6:16, "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein."

This response to God's appeal expresses somewhat of a climax to numerous appeals by the prophet of God to the people of Judah who had departed from the ways of the Lord. That nation, like so many before it and many since then, are representative of man's apostasy and self-imposed alienation from his Creator.

Genesis three records the first mutiny and revolt against God. Even as man was expelled from the Garden of Eden we read of the first indication of God's intent to provide the way of redemption for mankind. Genesis 3:15 has properly been recognized as referring to the Christ that would come, the "*seed of woman*" that would bruise Satan, He being bruised Himself by Satan when He died at Calvary.

Genesis six, after the flood in the time of Noah that destroyed all living except the eight in the ark, tells of another of man's apostasies with the erection of the Tower of Babel. That structure, built to get for themselves a name, was to prevent the spread of mankind throughout the world in direct contradiction to the instructions of God. It was something man erected to bring upon himself certain glory. But God frustrated this evil plot with the confusion of their languages that prohibited the completion of their intent. It was another instance where man preferred to govern himself rather than submit to the Almighty.

After God gave the wonderful promises to Abraham and the coming into reality of that special nation called Israel, we read time and again how Israel marred its history by its backsliding from God. The prophets God sent would plead with the priests, princes, false

prophets, and the people, but to no avail. As Hosea wrote, Hosea 11:7, "*And my people are bent to backsliding from me.*" Conditions so deteriorated that God's chosen people were taken into Assyrian and Babylonian captivity. Many efforts were made to produce reforms, but the ones who needed to reform would not have it so.

The text says to stand (stop), ask (listen), and see (look), walk (go). Stop, look, listen, and then go. Seeing what is right, follow what is right. There are many ways to be wrong, but only one way to be right. Finding that way depends on seeking for it.

Man Versus God

The revolts and rebellions of Israel underscore how there is a difference between God and man, God's ways and man's wicked ways. Jeremiah 10:23, Proverbs 14:12, Isaiah 55:8,9 all warn and advise that people follow folly to pursue their own course rather than God's. The same sentiment is stressed in Paul's letter to the Galatians, chapter one, verses six through nine. A perverted gospel is not the gospel at all. One of the more effective ways to pervert the gospel is to add to it. One can contaminate a perfectly good loaf of bread by inserting a small portion of poison into it. Pollution of fresh water can be accomplished by adding foul ingredients. Jeremiah accused the false prophets, "*For ye have perverted the words of the living God.*" (Jeremiah 23:26). People still do this same thing by teaching their creeds, feelings, perverted modern versions of the Bible, catechisms, disciplines, manuals, etc. that men have invented for religious guides. God said in Jeremiah 23:34, "*I will punish that man and his house.*" As then, so today, the perversion of the Word of the Lord has figured prominently in the history of man, even in the history of the church.

Periods of Church History

Church history can be divided into at least five periods, starting from the beginning of it. Actually, more than five periods can be designated if you include the periods when the church existed in the mind of God before it was founded on Pentecost in Jerusalem, and when it existed

in promise, prophecy, and preparation. But our periods in this study will begin with the origin of the church and its perfection.

The church was designed as Deity determined. As God created mankind in perfection, so the church began in perfection. The New Testament reveals the church as God planned it to be, exactly as He wanted it, and came at the time He set for it to come. The church began under the divine guidance of the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the apostles and other inspired men. The way the church was at the beginning is why we turn to that stage of its existence to learn what the church ought to be.

Departure

The second period is the period of departure. Just as man degenerated and departed from God's way through submitting to the temptations of the devil, so was it with the church. Gradually, slowly, step by step, men began to show their dissatisfaction with the church as God gave it, and made changes in its government, manner of worship, doctrine, mission, making accommodations and compromises with the ways of the world, imitating paganism, following human traditionalism, altering almost every facet of God's church into a perverted distortion. The very rule of faith, the Word of God, was set aside and other authorities instigated.

Apostasy

This led to the third period, the period of apostasy. The apostles had foretold this very tragic circumstance (First Timothy 4:1,2; Second Timothy 4:3; Second Thessalonians 2:3). As time proceeded there emerged a dominant religious power that came to be called Roman Catholicism. This was not the Lord's church, but an apostate church that had come into being as the result of men leaving God's way for their own. Man was subjected to that period of history known as the Dark Ages.

Reformation

The fourth period of religious history can be called the period of Reformation. It consists of a series of attempts

by many people to reform the existing apostate system from within. It was the effort of people who recognized the gross corruption of religion that was falsely called Christian and took note how far removed from God's plan it was.

Usually those who made these noble attempts were either suppressed or possibly annihilated. Entire groups of people were martyred. Notable names among the leaders of these efforts are Zwingli, Luther, Calvin, Knox, and many others. But their attempts of Reformation were only to produce a different kind of heresy. The dominance and assumed authority of the papacy were replaced by human creeds, disciplines, and divisions into denominations. The original ideas and goals to correct what was in error were proper as far as they were executed. These reformers tried to get back to the Bible, but were sidetracked by the doctrines of men that resulted in the clutter of churches of Protestantism.

Restoration

Eventually there came the period of Restoration. It is fair to say that compared to the periods of apostasy and Reformation the efforts of restoration have had little lasting impact on the religious world generally. Some have even rejected the efforts because they have lacked the "bigness" for which some religionists clamor. The idea of restoring New Testament Christianity is generally repudiated by those caught up in denominationalism. But it is the effort to go behind denominationalism and Roman apostasy, and go to the Bible with greater success than the Reformation. It was and is the determination to see the Lord's church as He intended it before men led it into apostasy. The movement is based on the thought of First Peter 4:11, *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God."*

Preachers from various religious backgrounds began to preach that men should believe what the first church believed, do as they did, practice what they practiced, organize as they were organized, worship as they worshipped, be as they were, calling themselves by the same name, and following the same standard, the Word of God. Such is the labor that faithful children of God

are undertaking even in our time. We are thankful to be a part of such an effort. It is a continuing process in that every generation must be taught everything.

There is the story of some who were caught up in the 1849 gold rush of California. One party was making its way westward but lacked water. With great hope they came upon a stream, but it was brackish, bitter, and unfit for drinking. One member of the party wandered upstream and found the spring from which the stream flowed. There he found pure and refreshing water before it became contaminated on its way downstream. He brought his companions to this thirst-quenching spring and they drank and were spared destruction. He had found the original source and its goodness as the water existed before the side streams poured in their pollution.

Back to the Original Fountain

This is an illustration of the scene of religion in the world. We need to go back to the fountain from which life flows. We must return to the perfect water of life and drink deeply of the Word of God. We cannot rely on the waters that have become soiled by the ways and doctrines of men. When we, or any people, will do this, we will find the Lord's church as the Lord gave it and revealed it. The intrusions of mankind into those realms reserved only for Deity caused the church to become "lost" in our world, even though the "*seed of the kingdom*," the Word of God, was never lost. But the consumption of that which God has revealed to us in the Bible will cause the church to be "found" for ourselves and for those who follow after us. Should not such an effort strike a responsive cord in our hearts?

* * * * *

It is with deep regret that now and again we learn than some brethren who once walked with us in the work of restoring New Testament Christianity have decided to leave the cause of Christ and seek the friendship and fellowship of denomination. JB

Ways to Improve the Church

May we have clearly in the mind just what it is in this discussion we are trying to improve. The church has a divine side and a human side. The divine side is from God, of God, perfect in design and every other respect. No man or group of men can improve on anything on the divine side of the church whether we speak of its government, work, worship, message, terms of entrance or any such thing. So much for those who clamor for "change" in the church in these areas.

But the church is composed of human beings. To be sure it is a composition of a very special group of human beings because they are people who have been washed clean of their sins by the blood of Christ and stand acceptable before God as God's spiritual children. But they are still mere people, subject to temptation, with human frailties, weaknesses, shortcomings, and personality peculiarities, different talents, and all with the capacity of producing various kinds of trouble for themselves and others.

So when we speak of improving the church it should be obvious we are talking about improving the human element of which the church is composed. There really ought not be any question in the mind of anyone that there is always room for improvement even in the very best of members. Let us suggest a few ways we can improve ourselves, and bring glory to God.

Start With Self

We should begin with self. This is probably where we will have the greatest influence if we really apply ourselves to the task. Second Corinthians 13:5, "*Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith.*" Galatians 6:1, "*Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.*" Self-examination is an oft repeated admonition in the

Scriptures. As one has said, "A better world begins with me."

Tell yourself, since you are not perfect, that you would not really fit in a perfect church. If you were so fortunate to find that perfect congregation it would cease to be so the moment you became a member of it. This is not a put down, but simply a recognition of our own limitations. It is realism. We are the saved, but we are not sinlessly perfect (First John 1:8,10). We have been born again (John 3:3-5), but we are still growing as we are taught to grow (Second Peter 3:18). We are in Christ, and to be found faithful in Christ is our task (Revelation 2:10). While we accept the fact that we are not perfect, we should never lean on the reality of our imperfections to dismiss the necessity of being rebuked and chastened when we go astray. We cannot dismiss our sins on the basis, "Well, I am only human." While we are only human, this is all the more reason for us to constantly be trying to improve.

Criticism and Prayer

We may be able to improve the church by being more careful about our criticisms. Some never seem to have much good to say about the church, but are loaded with criticisms.

When we are tempted to criticize we should accompany that criticism with prayer. We may not always be able to change others, but if we accompany our discovery of faults in others with prayer we shall improve ourselves. Criticisms are often just and deserving. They are even helpful especially when properly given and properly received. Sometimes they are unjust. They can even become backbiting (Second Corinthians 12:20). It is not hard to find fault in others. We are taught to ever be alert regarding false doctrines that may arise even from among brethren. We should be willing to examine criticism against ourselves regardless of what motive may have prompted it because it just may well be that somebody sees something in us that needs to be corrected and improved that we have not seen in ourselves. But genuine love will provoke prayer even when we must take issue over various matters. We should never be so

blinded as to think all criticism is bad. But let us be sure our motives are pure and our criticisms are helpful.

Find the Best

We can make improvements in the church by emphasizing the best rather than just concentrating on the worldly and worst brethren. This is not to say that we should ignore or pretend that evil does not arise among us. We should ever be ready to deal with it and rid the church of it. But there are many good faithful brethren. We can accent the dedicated brethren, those who are sincere, working, developing a spiritual mind more and more. Hypocrisy is certainly in the church and none who keep aware of reality would deny it. The hypocrite is a servant of the devil and a powerful weapon in his arsenal. He is a pretender and feigns piety. But every sin that is committed by brethren is not because of hypocrisy or due to their intent to deceive and pretend to be what they are not. Probably more often the sins of brethren are due to ignorance, weakness, and not having yet developed the spiritual strength that others may have already developed.

The devil likes to point out the weaker brethren and never calls attention to the strong and faithful Christians. He likes to present the church to the world only in terms of those who are not what they ought to be. This is not an honest presentation of the kind and quality of people that compose the church, however. Paul took note of faithful brethren (Romans 1:8; First Thessalonians 1:3). In the letters from the Lord to the churches of Asia, while he called attention to those who needed to make tremendous corrections, He also took note of the faithful, even the faithful few. Remember, even the Lord had a Judas. But He also had a John, James, Peter, and Paul. We do well to keep such people in the foreground of our thoughts as we consider the Lord's church.

Personal Responsibility

We make improvement when we do not blame others for our own faults. While we have influence on one another,

and often the influence may not be the best, our ultimate faithfulness is not dependent on others.

We read in Scripture how Adam tried to blame Eve for his sin. Eve tried to blame the devil. King Saul tried to blame the people. Aaron said the people were at fault for making the golden calf. Blaming others for our own faults has been characteristic of the human family. But facing our personal accountability and responsibility is a sign of reaching a higher level of maturity. We shall each give answer for ourselves (Second Corinthians 5:10). Others may provoke us, but this is still no excuse for our wrongs. We are not to return evil treatment for evil treatment (Romans 12:17-21). We have our own Christian duties regardless of what others may or may not do (Galatians 6:9; First Corinthians 15:58).

Being Involved

One way to improve the church, as we consider self, is when we consider some worthy work that is being neglected, and instead of asking why somebody does not do something, get busy doing it. Good works are often neglected. But too few ever seriously consider that they have just as much responsibility to see that a good work is done as their neighbor. We should not feel we have to wait until we are asked or assigned some work before we can be busy. Some seem to think everything must be highly organized before they can do anything. Surely, work done in the name of the church ought have the approval of those who have the oversight. But there are so many personal and individual responsibilities we can discharge if we would only set ourselves to the task. We do not have to wait for anybody to get at it. Self-initiative is a wonderful characteristic and many, fortunately, exhibit this trait. While the harvest is great, the laborers are few (Luke 10:2). We should make ourselves be among the laborers. Some of the most productive Christian work that has ever been done has been done quietly and consistently by individual Christians who go about their life as faithful Christians, without notoriety or fanfare, but who accomplish so much good because they engage in it, like the ant, without somebody having to push and shove them into action (Proverbs 6:6-8). We need to be more as was Alvin

York, hero of World War I, when asked why he did what he did. He responded, "I seen my duty and done it." We should look for and see our duty and do it. This would result in improvement of the church.

Attitude and Action Toward Others

We can be considerate and respectful toward others, seeking opportunities to do something beneficial for somebody else, especially those of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10). Have you really seriously studied that passage we sometimes call the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12)? The faithful practice of this principle would produce a rich, warm, loving, and brotherly fellowship that would be more akin to the heaven for which we long. Colossians 2:12 speaks of brethren being "*knit together in love*." Romans 12:10, "*Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love, in honor preferring one another*." Ephesians 2:21 says we are to be fitly framed together. We need the good influence of each other and should seek the good companionship from brethren (First Corinthians 15:33). While we must stand for the truth, let us try to keep in mind the feelings of others and be as considerate as we can be, toward the young as well as those who are older. We are, after all, of the same spiritual family, brothers and sisters in the Lord (John 13:35). Who could question the fact that the church would be better, the human side improved, if each Christian was more attentive to the welfare of all of God's children!

Seek Solutions

One additional reminder we mention is to recall that every church has certain problems. This has always been the case and as long as time remains will always be the case because each church is composed of people, imperfect people. Because there are problems is no reflection on the divine side of the church. As stated, that part of the church remains perfect, and is not subject to change. Every age, however, faces challenges. We are no different in that respect. We must learn to distinguish between truth and error, faith and opinion, sins and personality peculiarities. We must resist the pressures from the world and stand together as one

against that which seeks to destroy us all. We can and should uphold each other as each one upholds the truth.

While churches have problems we can try to be a part of the solution and not part of the problem. Problems cannot defeat us if we resist them, but we can defeat ourselves by letting problems get the best of us. With the help of God, and by faithfully following His lead as given in His all-sufficient Word, we can make the spiritual progress and improvement He expects of us. We can stand firm for the truth without wavering, and be loving at the same time. We can meet each day with hope, assurance, expectation, and enter every noble and righteous task with the determination and resolve we have. In so doing, who can doubt but we will be making improvement in the church!

* * * * *

Mormonism

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.*"

Among the religions of the world that must be tried is that called Mormonism, or the Church of Latter Day Saints. We need to know something of them because it is likely that we may encounter them from time to time since they are aggressive and active in winning converts by door-to-door personal work.

We do not impugn the motives, sincerity, nor honesty of all those people. But we do challenge the truthfulness of their claims and doctrines. While there are those who would consider any opposition to anything people do in religion to be a manifestation of hatred, this is not so. Some militantly oppose opposition. We examine Mormonism because the apostle John has directed that this be done. We recognize many good qualities of those called Mormons, such as their zeal, usually high moral

standards, and good works that they, like most religions, are active in performing.

We must consider the Book of Mormon and their attitude toward it. James Tolle has noted some quotations from their writings that tell us their attitude. "We consider the Bible, Book of Mormon, Book of Doctrine and Covenants, Pearl of Great Price, and Sayings of Joseph, the Seer, our guide in faith and doctrine." Again, "In council with the twelve apostles, Joseph Smith said, 'I told the brethren that the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts than by any other book'."

Tolle observed, "It is claimed that Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon from the original record on golden tablets through stones called Urim and Thummin, attended by the angel Moroni, and guided by divine power, and that, therefore, it is an infallible translation, free from all error: 'And we know that they (the golden plates) have been translated by the gift and power of God, for his voice hath declared it unto us; therefore we know of a surety that the work is true. The translation of the characters appeared on the Urim and Thummin, sentence by sentence, and as soon as one was correctly translated the next appeared'."

Tolle wrote, "Orson Pratt, one of the Mormon apostles, has made the following pertinent observation: 'The nature of the Book of Mormon is such that, if true, no one can possibly be saved and reject it; if false, no one can possibly be saved and receive it'."

Book of Mormon

"In the Book of Mormon, First Nephi 13:23-41, it is claimed that the book contains the covenants of the Lord, the plainness of the gospel as given by the apostles, the record of truth, and the plain and precious truths left out of the Scriptures. It is claimed to be a record in reduced form of a people called Nephites that was originally written 600 years before Christ. The Book of Mormon is claimed to have been written about 1,600 years ago by a man named Mormon and his son Moroni

adding to it and hiding it in 420 A.D. near Palmyra, New York. This would have been near 1,000 years before Columbus discovered the continent. The book was supposed to have been on engraved golden plates and found by Joseph Smith in the 1820's under the guidance of an angel named Moroni, and perfectly translated by Smith from a language he called Reformed Egyptian."

The book is supposed to be the history of those in America from the time of the Tower of Babel (after Noah's flood) until nearly 500 years after Christianity was established. Christ is said to have visited this continent after His ascension recorded in Scripture.

If the Book of Mormon is what is claimed for it there is one glaring and immediate inconsistency. How could there have been any "Christians," as Mormon call Christians, from 420 A.D. until the 1820's and the finding of the book? It was not available during all those years. Yet, it is supposed to be the "keystone of our religion," according to its founder.

Regarding the Bible

Please consider what these claims do to the Bible. While claiming the Bible to be the Word of God (Article 8 of their Articles of Faith), as far as has been correctly translated, they claim it is not correctly translated. But their objections are not simply based on what they call translational errors. James Bales records, "As Pratt put it: 'Indeed so much corruption in the old manuscript copies was calculated to throw a mist of darkness and uncertainty over the whole of them... All, therefore, is uncertainty as to the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of the Old Testament; they can be proved to be changed, added unto and corrupted in almost every text...'"

From other Mormon writings we read, "It is abundantly proved by various learned writers, that the Greek copies of the New Testament are awfully corrupted in almost every text... What shall we say then, concerning the Bible being a sufficient guide? Can we rely upon it in its present known corrupted state, as being a faithful record of God's Word? We all know that but a few of the inspired writings have descended to our times... What

few have come down to our day have been mutilated, changed, and corrupted in such a shameful manner that no two manuscripts agree... Add all this imperfection to the uncertainty of the translation and who, in his right mind, could for one moment suppose the Bible in its present form to be a perfect guide? Who knows that even one verse of the whole Bible has escaped pollution, so as to convey the same sense now that it did in the original? Who knows how many important doctrines and ordinances necessary to salvation may be buried in oblivion in some of the lost books."

It should not take a scholar to see that these statements are in direct contradiction to the Biblical claim of authority and all-sufficiency (Second Timothy 3:16,17), and the promise through Peter that the Word of God would endure (First Peter 1:24,25). As for words being lost that are necessary to salvation, if Mormons are right, then who could ever know the way of salvation? Jesus said, Matthew 24:35, "*Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.*" Who do we believe, Christ or the Mormons?

Ridicule of the Bible

Actually, the Book of Mormon ridicules the Bible. Second Nephi 29:3,6,10, "And because my words shall hiss forth - many of the Gentiles shall say: A Bible! A Bible! We have got a Bible, and there cannot be any more Bible... Thou fool, that shall say: A Bible, we have got a Bible, and we need no more Bible. Have ye obtained a Bible save it were by the Jews?... Wherefore, because that ye have a Bible ye need not suppose that it contains all my words; neither need ye suppose that I have not caused more to be written."

They believe one is a fool who relies on the Bible, seeing it is neither reliable nor accurate, but corrupted and polluted, insufficient and inadequate. Although they use the Bible as a "door opener," they do not believe it is what the Bible claims for itself but will believe what Joseph Smith claims for the Book of Mormon. The Bible claims inspiration, infallibility, inerrancy, all-sufficiency, and authority (Second Timothy 3:16,17). We ask what sin does the Bible not condemn? What good

does not the Bible commend? What doctrine has been omitted that is necessary to salvation? Where is there any evidence that the Book of Mormon supplies what the Bible is supposed to have left out? All of this about the Book of Mormon is nothing more than Mormon propaganda and animosity toward the Bible.

Latter Day Revelation

Mormonism is based on the claim of continuous revelation from God. In this they are like Catholics, Seventh-Day Adventists, Pentecostals, Nazarenes, Quakers, Christian Scientists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Protestants with all their many books. They all claim a direct guidance by the Holy Spirit for their extra-Biblical revelations, and all claim to perform miracles to prove they are right, and they all deny the other is right. Who does one believe? I deny them all their fallacious claims because the Bible teaches otherwise!

They blame religious division on the Bible. If the Bible is of God, this charges God with the cause of the very thing He condemns. God is not the author of confusion (First Corinthians 14:33). Division results from the creeds, manuals, catechisms, disciplines, prayer books, confessionals, and latter day revelations of human origins, including the books of Mormonism. Their Article 9 says of continuous revelation, "We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God." If that is true, then we really do not have truth, nor shall we ever have it, nor will the Mormons have it. Just remember, when one comes to your door, that you can advise him that what he is teaching you may not really be the truth because there may have been some latter day revelation since he checked with Salt Lake City headquarters that has overturned what he is saying.

Preeminent Prophet

So intent are Mormons for special and added revelation that they have said in the October, 1972 issue of Ensign, a monthly journal of their church in an article by Alma P. Burton, a quotation from Brigham Young stating that

'if the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Book of the Doctrine and Covenants were placed before him together,... those books do not convey the word of God direct to us now as do the words of a Prophet or a man bearing the Holy Priesthood in our day and generation."

Wilford Woodruff, a former president of Latter Day Saints, speaking of the same three books, "and they would scarcely be sufficient to guide us twenty-four hours. We have only an outline of our duties written; we are to be guided by the living oracles." Harold Lee, president of that church in 1972, said, "President Grant (president of the Mormon church, not the U.S. president, JWB) used to say to us...'Brethren, keep your eye on the President of this church. If he tells you to do anything and it is wrong and you do it, the Lord will bless you for it. But you don't need to worry, the Lord will never let his mouthpiece lead this people astray.'."

The Latter Day Saints are taught that God continues to speak to them through living prophets, so any contradiction between Mormonism and the Bible is almost automatically accepted as the result of latter revelation, with the correct instruction from the church president to be preferred to the written word, whether the Bible, or their own publications.

Book of Mormon Contradicts the Bible

Such teaching is not in harmony with such passages as Galatians 1:6-9 where Paul condemned anything different from what he had preached, and what the Galatian churches had received. They sure did not receive a message that was hidden until 420 A.D. It contradicts John 14:26, 16:13 where Christ promised the apostles they would be guided into all the truth. Peter was wrong when he claimed to have been given all things that pertain to life and godliness (Second Peter 1:3). Jude 3 teaches error when it teaches the faith has been once delivered to the saints. Paul could not have preached the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26,27) because all of it had not, and even ye has not, been revealed, according to Mormons. Which do you believe?

The contradictions of the Bible and Mormonism are so numerous we shall mention only a few to illustrate the falsity of Mormonism.

They say Christ came to America after His ascension, but the Bible says he took His throne and reigns in heaven and will until He comes again (Acts 2:33-35; First Corinthians 15:25,26). Mormons teach marriage extends beyond this life, even into heaven, but the Bible shows marriage is terminated at death (Romans 7:2; Matthew 22:30). Mormons teach baptism for the benefit of the dead who died unbaptized, but the Bible teaches each must obey for himself (Second Corinthians 5:10). When Paul asked, "*Why are they then baptized for the dead?*" (First Corinthians 15:29), he was proving the surety of the resurrection by showing how baptism was preparatory for the ultimate resurrection, not a case of one being baptized for another. Their claim of having apostles as successors to the Lord's apostles, as do many other religions, is shown to be impossible by the Bible because the qualifications for an apostles included being an eye witness to the resurrected Christ, taught by direct revelation, chosen by Christ personally, with power to perform miracles, and to give such power to others. None living today can meet such qualifications.

Errors of the Book of Mormon

As for the perfect Book of Mormon and its infallibility, is it not strange that there have been several "official" revisions of the book in later editions?

The Bible says Christ was to be born in Bethlehem. The Book of Mormon says it was Jerusalem. That book also says the Nephites were called members of the church, Christian (Alma 46:13). But this was 600 years before Christ. Acts 11:26 reads, "*And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*" The Book of Mormon claims to be from 2,600 years old, yet many verses in it are exact copies of the King James Version of the Bible, even some of the same grammatical peculiarities of the KJV. Yet the KJV was translated 1,200 years after Moroni was supposed to have buried the golden plates.

The Mormon elders are mere school age boys whereas Biblical elders were older men, with families who were faithful to Christ. But you can cite all of this to Mormons and it does not matter. We hear much of brainwashing in our day. Mormons are classic examples of how effectively people can be saturated with what some want them to believe. If you question what they say they will try to talk you down by spouting their "testimony" about Joseph Smith being a prophet and the Book of Mormon from God. This is the only way they can sustain their views. Some are honest, but there is abundant evidence this is not true of all of them.

The Bible is All-Sufficient

The Scriptures teach there is no continuous revelation. Joseph Smith said all spiritual gifts (tongues, revelations, etc.) would never cease. The Bible says they would (First Corinthians 13:8). How long were they to continue? Verses 8-10 says until "*that which is perfect is come.*" This was not that "who" is perfect will come and not with reference to Christ, but that which is of neuter gender, some thing. The infant church was established, taught, and edified by the preaching of the Word embodied in inspired men, earthen vessels (Second Corinthians 4:7). This is as Christ had promised His apostles (John 14:26; 16:13). Now this saving truth is in the inspired Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17). That which is perfect is the full, complete, perfect recorded will of God, "*the perfect law of liberty*" (James 1:25).

This same truth regarding the spiritual gifts is taught in Ephesians 4:11-13 where the special offices and gifts would be granted "*till we all come in the unity of the faith.*" This is not until we all believe alike, but until the full, unified body of truth was revealed and known. That faith has long since come (Jude 3). Therefore, there are no living apostles, no latter day prophets and prophecies, or special revelations since the completion of the New Testament. This Biblical teaching makes all claims of latter day revelation, regardless of the religion, false claims. Just remember to mention to the Mormon "elder" who may visit you that if continuous revelation is true, they cannot even be sure that they are telling you the truth when they come to see you. It may

have changed for all they know. Many doctrines of Mormonism have changed through the years regarding marriage, church government, state of the Negro race, and many other matters we cannot include here.

Mormonism is a false religion, anti-Biblical, not founded on truth, but formed by men perpetuated through zeal, Biblical ignorance and disrespect. It is more of a cult than a church. When we do as John taught (First John 4:1), and try the Mormon faith, we can affirm confidently that there are indeed many false prophets gone out into the world, and Mormons are among them.

* * * * *

Laborers in the Vineyard

Matthew 20:1-16, *"For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth hour and ninth hour, and did likewise. Again about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the laborers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman*

of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen."

This is one of the nearly fifty allegorical, figurative, and parabolic teachings recorded of Jesus. He often taught with parables in order to create understanding among those who desired the truth, but at the same time it would allow those whose minds were closed to remain in darkness.

A Parable

There have been various definitions of a parable. It is a comparison between familiar and physical facts and situations with spiritual truths. It is not a mere fable that is make-believe and essentially of the earth. But a parable looks heavenward. It is not a myth which can be a vehicle of truth, but not the truth itself. A parable speaks of what is realistic, actual, something that either has happened or could happen. It is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Usually it contains one, possibly two major lessons. One of the mistakes and dangers regarding parables that we might make is to make more of the parable than what was intended by trying to assign some deep significance to every minute element of it. Inconsistencies and contradictions can be created by doing this. This parable teaches us regarding the kingdom, which is the church, and something about those in the church.

Major Comparisons

The major comparisons might be listed as the householder or Christ, the vineyard or His kingdom or church and the place of service to the Master, the laborers who are Christians called to His work, the marketplace as the world from which laborers are

called, and the reward which represents the blessings given through Christ, even life eternal.

The parable emphasizes the authority of Christ as the householder. He is the One who calls others into service. The vineyard is His and He determines the reward. There is none superior to Him.

The Lord desires workers in His vineyard and seeks people to serve Him. He calls them from the sinful idleness of the world by the message of the gospel and motivates them by offering a reward. The potential reward is one of the motives for serving God, along with the motive of escaping punishment. The highest motive of service is love. Christians serve by reaching the lost, caring for the needy, attending to the sick and aged, rearing their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, living moral lives, learning more and more of His way, and practicing that way in daily life, encouraging one another in love toward faithfulness and loyalty to Christ. Another essential in serving God is worshipping Him. All worship is service, but not all service is worship. There are specific acts of worship that God has revealed in the New Testament that we are to do according to His will.

Reward

There is a reward for the laborers. Matthew 5:11,12 says "*great is your reward in heaven.*" Paul wrote of the "*crown of righteousness*" which he and others would be given (Second Timothy 4:6-8). The "*crown of life*" is the theme of Revelation 2:10. But people must serve in the vineyard in order to receive the reward. The reward is not for those who remain outside. Nor will it be given to those who may have served in many good things but were never in the Lord's vineyard. The spiritual blessings that God gives are to be found "*in Christ*" (Ephesians 1:3). One cannot labor in the devil's vineyard and expect to receive the Lord's reward. This is why our labor "*is not in vain in the Lord*" (First Corinthians 15:58).

Laborers Come at Different Times

Laborers were hired at different hours. This is analogous to people obeying the gospel at different times in life. Some come to Him in the days of youth, some in middle years, others toward the sunset of life. Reward is not necessarily determined according to the number of years spent in service but according to the spirit of service regardless of the years involved. Christ is certainly not teaching nor encouraging delay because one's soul is in danger of hell so long as he remains outside the vineyard. To deliberately delay would betray a wicked and unsubmitive spirit toward His service. As the song admonishes, "There is danger and death in delay." Such would be contrary to the plea that "*now*" is the day of salvation (Second Corinthians 6:2).

Degrees of Reward and Punishment

Nor does this nullify the impressions that there are degrees of reward and punishment as other passages indicate. We are taught how the day of judgment will be "*more tolerable*" for some than others. Some will receive "*many stripes*" and others will receive "*few stripes*." We shall be rewarded and judged according to our individual works (Second Corinthians 5:10). Our works in life are different.

Neither is Jesus showing that it is proper for brethren to be jealous and envious of the rewards of others who may not have had to serve as long nor as hard. This is taking the parable beyond the lesson that is intended and emphasizing beyond propriety.

Redeem the Time

The parable is teaching that we must take advantage of the opportunity to serve at the earliest hour we can. Whenever that opportunity comes, we are to seize it. So long as there is opportunity it is not too late, even though there obviously comes the hour when there will be no more opportunity. The parable stresses that settlement and reward is at the end of service, not before. The reward is for those who labor, not for those who do not. Therefore, we must enter the service of the Master, enter into His vineyard, as soon as we have opportunity if we expect to receive His blessings.

Question Answered

The message of Jesus is an answer to the question of Matthew 19:27, "*Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?*" In verse sixteen the rich, young ruler had asked, "*Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?*" Christ answered him, "*Keep the commandments.*" The ruler later went away sorrowful even though he had done that. He lacked one thing. He evidently put his commitment to his wealth before commitment to service to God. He was not willing to work in the vineyard, sacrificing whatever had to be sacrificed to labor for the Master. It was then that Jesus taught the difficulty of rich men entering the kingdom. It was not that it was impossible, but it was impossible without God. One who trusts in riches is not trusting in God. Anyone can be saved God's way, but none can be saved any other way. Too many who are rich allow their wealth to mean more to them than God's way.

Peter noted that the apostles had put Christ first, having forsaken all and followed Him. Then Peter asked, "*What shall we have therefore?*" The Lord's answer was that those who enter into the labor of the Lord's vineyard shall receive the Lord's reward. This was a comforting, reassuring, hopeful, and motivating promise.

First and Last

Please notice the phrase at the beginning (19:30) and at the close of the parable (20:16) regarding the first and last. This phrase is found three times in the New Testament with three senses. In Luke 13:30 it teaches that Gentiles as well as the Jews would be acceptable to God. Matthew 19:30 teaches that those who the world may consider first, possibly due to wealth and other measures, are not necessarily counted first with God. Matthew 20:16 teaches that those who enter the vineyard last, even late in life, shall be rewarded just as will those who entered His service early in life. But we must learn the main emphasis of the necessity of working in His vineyard and entering therein at the earliest opportunity.

How does one enter the vineyard? How does he answer the invitation to work? He is invited, called, by the gospel. He must respond favorably to that call by obeying the commands of the gospel, including faith, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism in water into Christ for the remission of sins. Having answered the call, he labors until the end of the day and then he shall receive the Lord's reward. Have you entered the vineyard? Are you laboring faithfully?

* * * * *

ONLY BY EXAMPLE?

There are those who contend that the authority of elders is limited to leading only by example. Some do this because they do not want to submit to the elder's decision to disallow certain modern perversions of the Bible that some of these products of our digressive schools advocate.

First Timothy three teaches the qualifications of men who are to serve as elders or bishops. Among them, "*One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity, (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God)?*" Ruling his own house is demonstrative of his ability to take care of the church of God. Are we to think and be so foolish as to declare that fathers in the home can only lead by example? Has he no authority to direct, even command and insist upon certain things?

Indeed, we know the father has authority. In the Old Testament, Genesis 18:19, it is said of Abraham, "*For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him.*" Deuteronomy 32:46 we read how parents were taught to command their children. Are those who give commands void of authority? Certainly not!

The home is one proving ground for one who may be called upon to take the work of an elder and assume leadership in a congregation. Leadership gives him authority to do the work God has assigned he do. JWB

Love is Not Enough

This idea that love covers all things is a misnomer. We insist that even in marriage that is acceptable to God, love by itself is not powerful enough to maintain the relationship God wants.

Love is defined as "seeking the other's highest good." That is certainly a binding and sealing force in any relationship. But marriage commands something extra.

That extra is commitment to one another, to an ideal, a standard as given by God, to a vow and promise before God and man. Regardless of what becomes of one's attitude toward their mate, and there are factors that can mar and damage the love that ought exist, the marriage will be sustained because of the commitment made. By the determination to live up to what has been promised, one will make the home solid and secure. Not until one can commit himself to the divine principles of marriage as well as to another ought marriage be considered. JWB

The Last Word

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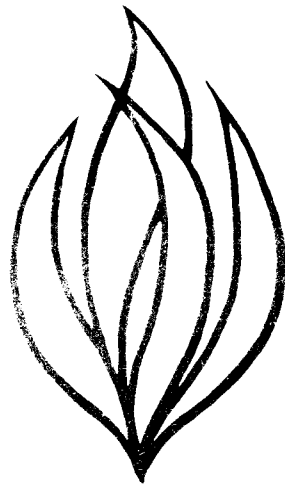
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A Burning Fire



*"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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The Empty Seat

Hebrews 10:23-27, *"Let us hold the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries."*

Let us also look at another text from the Old Testament, and first consider the background of it. David was already in the service of Saul, the first king of Israel. He was already recognized as a national hero and the people sang his praises. Saul was very jealous of David and had previously tried to slay him.

The time of the new moon approached. It was a significant time for the Jews as it marked the beginning of the month. It was celebrated with a feast, ceremonies, and sacrifices. Saul was to prepare a feast and David and many others were expected to be present. It was David's duty to be there because he was now an official of Saul's kingdom. Because of Saul's enmity toward him, David asked permission of Jonathan, Saul's son and heir apparent, to be dismissed from the feast, and permission was granted. But we read in First Samuel 20:18, Jonathan said, *"Tomorrow is the new moon; and thou shalt be missed because thy seat will be empty."*

The Problem

We wish to consider the problem of the empty seat with regard to the assembly of brethren. The Lord's church suffers seriously because so many allow their seat to be empty at the worship periods. There are some parallels between the case of some today and that of David.

At the time that David belonged in his seat he planned to be elsewhere. He would be missed. Habitual and

deliberate absenteeism from the assembly is not accidental. It is more often than not because we plan to be absent, either doing other things or allowing them to interfere and permitting them to push aside our sacred duty to worship God. We mistakenly sometimes refer to an absence being due to a providential hindrance. Actually, this is a misnomer. Providence is the operation of God. God does not command something of us and then erect barriers that prevent us from doing what He has commanded. There may be times and circumstances that may arise over which we do not have control that may make attendance impossible, such as illness, caring for the sick, or other unplanned and unexpected interferences. But we ought not lay the blame for our absence on a work of God when it is our own doing. More often it is because we plan to be absent.

Others Notice

There are those who will take note of our absence just as Jonathan told David some would notice that his seat was empty. Those who are enemies of the church will notice when we are absent. Saul was David's enemy and Saul noted his absence (verse 27). People who know that we profess to be Christians and who know the obligation of the Christian to worship God on the first day of the week will see us when we fail to discharge that duty and privilege. While Saul got angry that David was absent, we can be sure that Satan and those who serve him will not be angry to see that we have failed. It gives them the opportunity to say, "See how little his faith really means to him." No wonder so many in the world are not impressed with the Lord's church. So many who claim to make up the church do not discharge their duty to faithfulness in worship. They not only neglect to do what they ought, but they defy a divine command and disobey God.

Christian brethren will miss you. Jonathan missed David because he loved David and wanted him present. When brethren assemble, regardless of the hour, they miss those who have chosen not to attend. They are trying to be faithful, but they are discouraged and disappointed that one of their brethren care so little for them or for God. Seldom is there an assembly when the

absentees are not mentioned in prayer, not self-righteously, but out of concern for the soul of the ones who see fit to ignore their duty.

God misses you when you are absent. God knows not only that you are absent, but He knows the **REAL** reason why. Nothing escapes His awareness (Hebrews 4:13). The excuses that people often use to justify in their own mind why they refused to worship do not carry weight with God. He knows why we stay away and how we could have been present if we had just cared enough to be present. He knows how we make our plans without proper regard for our duty as a child of God. While one might deceive himself, and even some of the brethren, we cannot deceive God when we are absent. Transgression of God's will does not go unnoticed and God holds us accountable.

Why We Meet

When we assemble, it is to worship God. We are not merely "going to church" like we were attending some club meeting. It is without explanation how some professed Christians can take disobedience to a divine command so lightly, as if it were nothing important. We are to meet around the Lord's Table at His call. When an invitation from anybody is refused, common courtesy demands a better response than to simply ignore it. We would not treat dignitaries of this world with the same discourtesy that some evidently have toward the Lord .

Absenteeism deprives us of something vital to spiritual growth and development, which itself is commanded (Second Peter 3:18). We cannot and will not grow without spiritual food, which is the Word of God (First Peter 2:2). We are expected to offer spiritual sacrifices of praise (Hebrew 13:15). Deliberate absenteeism from partaking of the Lord's Supper is tantamount to a refusal to proclaim the Lord's death 'till He comes again (First Corinthians 11:23-29). Love for God will motivate us to always be present whenever physically possible.

Worship is a period of communion and fellowship with God and the brethren. It is the performance of a sacred and divinely commanded duty. It is the proper

stewardship of influence, time, and talents. All of these matters should concern those who really expect to go to heaven after this life ends. Dare we pass off so serious a matter with the trite excuses that generally characterize brethren? Can our love for God and the opportunity to worship be set aside so easily as if the whole operation were superficial, optional, and really does not matter? Is it not obvious that many evidently so consider the periods of worship?

Is Our Seat Really Empty?

When we are absent, in one sense our seat is empty. But in another sense it is really not empty at all. It is full of testimony to the spiritual neglect of which we are guilty. The seat stands before all as a source of discouragement, especially to those who care for our souls and who are trying so hard to do what God directs. Our empty seat is a monument to our spiritual immaturity and/or indifference. Our empty seat is a delight to the enemies of the Lord. How can one be at peace with himself knowing he is giving the forces of evil additional ammunition to war against the forces of God? In view of so much in this world that is stained with spiritual darkness, with the decline of morality, with the desecration of things sacred, with our young growing up in a society where God and His Son are cast aside for the paltry and wicked ways of a degenerate world, how can a Christian be indifferent to such things?

Yes, there is a problem of the empty seat in the Lord's church. Is it my seat that is creating this problem? Is it yours? Are we guilty of habitual, deliberate, frequent absence? Are we planning things that prevent our loyalty to duty? Those who are content with the empty seat in the assembly here and now may have to accept the fact that they will have no seat around the throne of God in heaven. Obedience to God is essential to salvation. Hebrews 10:25 cannot be dismissed and shunted as if it does not matter. Faithfulness in worship will never be considered a light and trivial matter to those who are truly faithful children of God.

* * * * *

Analysis of Matthew 5: 31,32

If one who attempts to preach and teach takes his work and responsibility seriously, he will be sobered by such Bible teaching as James 3:1 and Matthew 15:14, "*My brethren, be not many masters (teachers, JWB) knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation... And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.*" It must be the desire of every proclaimer, whether he proclaims verbally or through the printed page, to present truth and refute error. He must have the dual motive of upholding what is right and opposing what is wrong in order that souls might be saved. It requires both positive and negative preaching to preach the whole counsel of God. Such is surely critical on the subject of marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

There is so much error being taught on this theme. This tragedy is compounded, and possibly causes to some degree, the widespread practice of divorce in our nation, a nation that leads all others in the dissolution of what God has joined together. Adults and children are suffering inestimable damage because of the general disregard of God's laws on this subject. The moral climate of the nation has stooped to such a low level that immorality is commonplace and now even considered socially acceptable.

Admittedly, the subject is a controversial one. But let us understand something about controversial subjects. This does not mean that there is not an absolute right and wrong regarding it. It may mean that learning the truth may be more difficult than some other subjects. But it simply means there are some who accept God's truth about it and some who refuse to accept it and therefore there is controversy over it. We intend to present three lessons in this issue from three relevant passages that discuss this subject beginning with Matthew 5:31,32, then studying Matthew nineteen, and finally Romans seven and First Corinthians seven. Our appeal can only

be made to those who care about right and wrong. We are painfully aware that all do not care for the truth, and would not conform to it even if they learned it. Efforts to sidestep truth is one of the causes for so much error being taught and practiced regarding it.

The Text

Our text comes from the Sermon on the Mount, the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23). It is the section where Christ was contrasting what people had heard with His own will. They had heard the law and many interpretations by the rabbis of the law, along with various perversions of the law. Christ did not make distinction between the Old Testament law and the perversions, not that they were the same, but simply used the formula, *"Ye have heard..., but I say unto."* From this approach He discussed such subjects as murder, adultery, divorce, perjury, vengeance, benevolence, and other pertinent themes.

Matthew 5:31,31, *"It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement. But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery; and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery."* This teaching is substantially repeated in Matthew nineteen but with a different emphasis. Chapter nineteen focuses on the husband and how he sins when he puts away a chaste wife and remarries. Chapter five focuses on the sin he provokes when he puts away his wife and then she marries again. Not only is the sin of putting away discussed, but also the sin involved when one marries a divorced person when the divorce was not because of fornication. In both instances Christ deals with those who marry, divorce, and remarry. The circumstances and conditions are of vital importance.

"It has been said..." refers to Deuteronomy 24:1,2. The rabbis disagreed as to the acceptable grounds for divorce. There were essentially two schools of thought. The Hillel school contended that most anything that displeased the husband was sufficient cause. They would fit well into today's society. This was a very liberal,

permissive, and indulgent view. The Shammai idea was that only unchastity, adultery, allowed putting away. Uncleanliness, a matter of moral defilement and nakedness, would seem to eliminate divorce for mere trivial reasons. Such implied shameful and disgraceful behavior that was sexual in nature. The grounds were not that specifically stated, however, with definite limits.

The prophet Malachi (2:15,16) records the Lord's displeasure of divorce and putting away one's mate. Matthew nineteen shows how Jesus taught that divorce was never intended.

What Is Not Taught

This text under study does not teach that divorce was approved, but tolerated because of the hardness of heart (Matthew 19:8). Deuteronomy 24:1,2 does not teach approval of divorce, but is a command for a writing of divorcement in the event of a divorce. It called for a legal document. At no time do we read where God gave pleasurable sanction to divorce. It does not teach that God once approved it but has changed His mind.

"But I say unto you..." contrasts Christ's doctrine with the views they had heard from the law of Moses and the rabbis. It was more in substantial agreement with the Shammai school than the Hillel school, however. It allowed divorce in the event of fornication.

The One Cause

The very essence of marriage is *"one flesh,"* and union for life. Fornication is a fundamental breach of contract and vow. Christ does not demand divorce, but allows it under this circumstance. One is not compelled to continue to cohabit with a mate who is unfaithful in his or her vows to keep himself or herself only to the mate. A continued toleration of such sin by the offended mate could imply sanction of it.

But should a man put away his wife for any other cause and she remarries, she commits adultery, and so does the one she takes as her second mate. But the first

husband shares in the responsibility for provoking such a sin. She becomes an adulteress. The one marrying her becomes guilty of adultery. The disregard of the one cause that allows divorce causes all to be guilty of sin in different ways. Fornication is the only cause that we find in Scripture that allows divorce.

What Is Fornication?

What is fornication? How does it differ in meaning from adultery? Fornication is a broader and more inclusive term than adultery. It refers to any unlawful sexual intercourse without respect of one's marital status. It includes extra-marital and pre-marital sexual intercourse, whether it be heterosexual, homosexual, bestial or whatever. Adultery is also sexual sin and occurs when either or both of those involved are married, but not to each other. All adultery is fornication. But it has a more limited meaning than fornication. Adultery may be the most prominent form of fornication. The terms are often used interchangeable, however, with reference to illicit heterosexual behavior. The broader term, fornication, is the ground for divorce. Remarriage after a divorce on other grounds is forbidden and causes one to enter the state of adultery. Such a remarriage is prohibited by Scripture.

Living in Sin

Does a participant in a forbidden marriage "live" in adultery? Some argue that one cannot "live" in adultery because adultery is an act. Adultery is an act, but it is also a state or condition. Romans 6:1,2 teaches we can live in sin and sin is both an act and a state or spiritual condition. Colossians 3:5-7 records how some once lived in fornication. Adultery is one form of fornication. One can "live" in the state or condition of adultery.

It is argued that the second marriage is called a marriage and it is therefore acceptable. Hebrews 13:4 is cited to contend that everything called a marriage is approved of God. But Scripture uses such terms as prophets, apostles, gospel, Christs, as well as marriage, and just because the terms are used there is no implication that every time it refers to that which God approves. There are false

Christs, false prophets, perverted gospels, and false apostles. Nehemiah 13:23 tells how Jews were married to heathens, but this was not acceptable to God even though their relationships were called marriages. Ezra told them to “*put them away*” (Ezra 10:3) because such “marriages” were unacceptable to God.

Does It Apply Now, and To Whom?

Others have said the text is not applicable except to Christians and does not apply to those who may have been married, divorced, and remarried prior to becoming a Christian. But the truth is that God’s law on the subject as given through Christ makes all amenable to it. The term “*whosoever*” is universal.

The phrase of Matthew 5:32, “*commit adultery*,” is present tense and means a continuing action or state. One continues in adultery as he remains in such a “marriage.”

Some have even gone so far to justify the sins of people regarding marriage that they have defined adultery as the divorce, not a sexual cohabitation or mating. This is absurd. There is no definition of adultery that excludes sexual intercourse unless one speaks of spiritual adultery or unfaithfulness to God. Let a false teacher redefine words and he can teach anything, and does.

We even read of one denominationalist who contended that God has one specific man for one specific woman and if a man and woman marry and later learn that they were not intended for each other their relationship was an adulterous one and they should divorce and keep searching until they find the one God intended for them. There is no end to the ridiculous, blasphemous, and diabolical abuses people have heaped against God’s law on marriage, divorce, and remarriage.

Matthew 5:32 demands that we accept the conclusion that Christ’s will is the same as what God intended from the beginning. God disapproves of divorce and always has. There is only one ground for divorce regardless of what society or the civil powers might accept. Divorce is wrong. Divorce for other reasons and then remarriage

means those involved commit adultery. So long as they remain in that relationship they will keep on in the state of adultery. We shall see more in detail when we study Matthew 19:3-9.

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Matthew 19:3-9

The Scriptures teach the will of God concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage. We must learn it whether we be old, young, married, unmarried, and especially if we are in a condition that will condemn us. The world generally has abandoned what the Lord teaches even though He is the originator and designer of marriage. Religion has so compromised with the world that it is seldom an effective element in combatting the increasing divorce rate and occurrence of adultery. Even some who profess to be members of the church of Christ have adopted false doctrines in place of the truth, accommodating the sinful condition into which some have placed themselves rather than standing firm and true to the Word of God. Domestic immorality in our nation threatens its very continuation as a blessed and free people. But who is listening?

False Positions

The Pharisees approached Jesus tempting Him with questions regarding marriage and divorce. False ideas had been taught then just as they are taught now. The word of God had been wrested and doctrines concocted to fit the sinful conditions of man rather than changing the conditions to conform to His will. Some of these false doctrines that are so blatantly contradictory to the very essence and tenor of marriage are still propagated today. For instance, some say that if one is in an unscriptural marriage, having divorced for reasons other than fornication and remarried anyway, thereby living in adultery, if one becomes a Christian he can continue in that adulterous relationship. The truth is that even though sins can be forgiven, whether it be

polygamy, homosexuality, adultery, there is the necessity of repentance that demands the cessation of the sinful conduct. One cannot continue in sin and be a faithful Christian (Romans 6:1,2).

There are others who have invented the doctrine that God's law regarding marriage and divorce only applies to Christians. Therefore, the doctrine contends, all marriages entered into before becoming a Christian do not count. They teach that nobody except a child of God is amenable to what Jesus taught even here in Matthew nineteen. They call it by the unscriptural term, a "covenant passage." What they refuse to admit is that God's law applies universally and this we shall document before this lesson is completed. When Christ taught on the subject He restated God's intent for marriage from the beginning and it was and is applicable to all.

Others say that in the event of divorce, even for fornication, the guilty party is as free to remarry as the other. The argument says that marriage broken for one is broken for both. That is true, but that does not answer the problem. All agree that the innocent has the right to remarry (although some might even war against this), but some fail to recognize that not only is the marriage bond broken, the law of God grants the innocent the right of divorce and remarriage, but God's law says nothing that condones the remarriage of the guilty. There simply is no authority to teach the guilty may remarry with God's approval. We strongly deny the right of the guilty to put away his mate and remarry. Such false doctrines often taught by those involved in bad situations, or who have relatives so involved, have caused many people to be deceived and to think their marriage is acceptable to God when in reality they are living in adultery.

Similarity

Matthew nineteen is similar in some respects to Matthew five which was discussed in the previous lesson. We encourage the reader to acquaint himself with the text of Matthew 19:3-9, and then return to our comments.

Verse three tells us that the Pharisees asked Jesus a question. This question reflects the practice of putting away one's mate for any cause, however trivial. It also reflects false doctrines taught then and now. Verses 4-6 is Christ's answer. He cites the original record as God intended. Marriage is for life and what God has joined should not be put asunder by man. God has not joined every union into which people may enter even if it is called a marriage. One must be marriageable before marriage can be approved by the Lord. Not all are marriageable because of previous conduct.

His answer also shows the law to be universally applicable, being given at the beginning of the race before there was Christianity. Notice the broad term, "*whosoever*." That is all inclusive. God's marriage law is not a church ordinance or a sacrament. It is not just applicable to Christians. Regardless of what anybody has said or done prior to Christ, the will of Christ is that which has been from the beginning.

Second Question; Two Phrases

Verses seven and eight offer a second question. Take note that Deuteronomy 24:1,2, to which the questioners referred, did not command divorce, nor sanction divorce, nor approve divorce, but commanded a writing of divorcement, a document, in the event of divorce. Christ's response to their second question explains why divorces were allowed (not approved). It was the hardness of their hearts, their stubborn will, their rebellious attitude. He repeated that it was never God's intent for divorce to occur.

Verse nine is Christ's teaching, like that in Matthew five, in contrast to what they had heard in times past from whatever source. There are two phrases involved in the verse. (1) "*Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery.*" (2) "*And whosoever marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.*"

The first phrase is a statement of the general rule regarding divorce and remarriage. It is forbidden. There is one exception to this general rule. It is stated in what

is called an exceptive clause, which means the cause is the only cause for the exception. Only if there has been fornication can there be an allowed divorce.

The second phrase deals with those who marry a person who has been put away. There are two "whosoever" in this verse. One, the one who puts away his mate on grounds other than fornication and remarries; two, the one who marries the put away one, regardless of the reason for having been put away. The put away one simply has no right to remarry. If they do the one they marry is guilty of adultery and both would be guilty.

Consider the meaning of the phrase "*committeth adultery*." This meaning cannot be ignored and set aside without doing violence to what is taught. It is present tense, meaning a continuing action. Literally, one who puts away a mate on grounds other than fornication and remarries keeps on committing adultery. It matters not what society or civil law may accept. This is what God's Word teaches.

The passage teaches that all persons who shall put away their mate, except for the reason of fornication of the one being put away, and remarries, keeps on committing adultery. Those who put away a companion who has committed fornication has the right to put away that companion who has committed fornication and to remarry if they choose, provided the one they marry also has the right to marry. Persons guilty of fornication and are put away because of that are not granted the right to remarry and be pleasing to God. The right of putting away and remarrying belongs to the one who is innocent of fornication, not the guilty.

An Objection

But some complain, "If the wife is loosed from the husband, the husband is also loosed from the wife." Agreed! But that is not the question regarding the right of putting away and remarrying. Such is not merely determined by the matter of loosing. Both are still amenable to God's law on marriage. There is more involved than simply a man and woman, husband and

wife. God's law grants the innocent the right to put away and remarry, but no such right is granted the guilty.

Others complain, "That means many couples are living in adultery." This is the sad truth. But their state and relationship does not change the will of the Lord.

Is there no forgiveness for the fornicator? Yes, provided the conditions are met. If a fornicator is not a Christian he must obey the gospel to be forgiven. If one is a Christian but guilty of fornication he must be restored to be forgiven. But forgiveness does not grant permission for remarriage. Baptism will not make adultery a union holy before God. The put away one still has no right to remarry nor remain in an adulterous union.

Three Classes

There are three classes of people who have the right to marry. (1) Those who have never married. (2) Those who have been married but their mates have died. (3) Those who have married but divorced because their mate was guilty of fornication. In all three instances we are assuming that both parties to the marriage have the right of marriage. Both must fit into one of these three categories.

The innocent or offended mate, the one not guilty of fornication, may choose to forgive their fornicating mate and reestablish their relationship. He or she may not choose to exercise the option to divorce. God will forgive when and if conditions are met. Conditions require repentance. Repentance demands cessation from sin and leaving an adulterous union. Genuine repentance produces a reformed life. One cannot keep on stealing, lying, or committing adultery.

Any other approach to marriage nullifies the sanctity of marriage and renders the teaching of Jesus null and void. If the false doctrines being taught today were true, it would have been useless for Christ to have taught anything, but just let people do whatever they will. That is not the way of the Lord.

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Romans 7:1-7 and First Corinthians 7:10-16

The three lessons on the passages relating to marriage, divorce, and remarriage are so necessary, especially in light of the permissiveness in society, the moral laxity, and the lack of proper consideration for the sanctity of marriage that dominates the minds of so many people. God's law on this theme has been the same from the beginning until now. The basic factors of His will remain (1) marriage is for life, (2) divorce is allowed, but only for one cause which is fornication, (3) remarriage is permissible for those whose mates have died, or for those whose mates were put away because the mate was guilty of fornication. Remarriage under other circumstances is adultery (4) Only the one who is innocent of fornication in the event of divorce has the right to remarry. The guilty does not have such a right. (5) Those who enter into a marital union when either party is not marriageable enter into an adulterous union.

Please read the text of Romans 7:1-7 and return to our comments. This study does not add to what has already been discussed, but will underscore certain points.

The Main Theme

Romans 7:1-7 does not have as its primary purpose the teaching of marriage. The theme of Romans deals in part with the relationship of the law of Moses to the law of Christ. Paul used marriage to illustrate this relationship. Like Ephesians five regarding Christ and the church, marriage is used to define and describe certain truths. Being used, however, enables us to understand certain truths regarding marriage.

Paul was speaking to those who were knowledgeable of God's law and what it allowed and required. Verses two

and three emphasize that marriage is for life. Remarriage is permissible upon the death of one of the mates. This does not negate the exception to the life long rule of marriage taught in Matthew five and nineteen. It simply states the general rule and original intent. Christ did include the one exception.

Marriage is for life. It is dissolved at death (Mark 12:26). Also see First Corinthians 7:29 on this point. Remarriage, however, while one's mate is alive constitutes adultery. There is nothing complicated about the passage. It simply does not include the exception as does the teaching of Jesus in Matthew. The passages do not contradict. One includes information the other does not take into consideration.

The application of Romans seven was that as one is bound to a mate as long as one lives, and is not bound upon death, nobody is now bound to the law of Moses because we are dead (separated) from that law. It has been nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14) and taken out of the way (Hebrews 10:9; Matthew 5:17,18) because it has been fulfilled. Such is also the theme of Galatians and Hebrews. Christians are married to Christ and delivered from the old law (verses 6,7) which includes the Ten Commandments, the tenth of which is specifically noted. While it remains true that we are bound by nine of the ten commandments, the fourth being the exception, this is true because these nine are also included in the law of Christ and taught by the authority of Christ, and not because of the authority of Moses and the law that came through him.

The important point to learn here regarding marriage is that it is intended to last "until death do thee part." Remarriage prior to separation by death is adultery. But remember the Lord's one exception to this general rule.

Not Another Reason

First Corinthians 7:10-16 has been misused by some to claim that Paul taught a second reason for divorce in addition to fornication as taught by Christ. The "second reason" is said to be desertion. They call it the "Pauline privilege," contending that the deserted mate can

remarry even though fornication does not exist. But the chapter does not concern itself with divorce and remarriage at all. It does not give a second reason for divorce. It is concerned with the conduct of a Christian who is married to a non-Christian, and who faces a potential or already existing separation.

It should be obvious that it is not necessarily sinful in itself for a Christian to be married to a non-Christian. It is not an encouragement to such a relationship, but if it was sinful to be so married then Paul surely would have commanded the Christian to leave the marriage. This is also a death blow to those who contend God's marriage laws are applicable only to Christians. How could His law be applicable to the Christian and not the non-Christian? They were married in the sight of God and to each other and God recognized the legitimacy of that marriage. If that were not so their children would not be legitimate, but Paul says they were. Furthermore, the Christian is taught not to leave the non-Christian mate, but other passages teach the Christian to try to convert the mate. They are not to put away their mates if their mate is willing to continue to live with them as husband and wife.

But the loyalty of the Christian belongs first to Christ. If the non-Christian mate wishes to leave, the Christian is to let them leave rather than surrender loyalty to Christ. The chapter deals with the choice that is possibly imposed upon the Christian who is married to a non-Christian. Shall I follow Christ or leave Christ and follow my mate? The answer Paul gives is clear and plain. Christ must always be first with every Christian.

What Bondage?

Consider the phrase "*not under bondage*," that some say means the Christian is no longer under the marriage bond. The word "*bondage*" is from the word "doulou," which means a bondsman, a servile condition. It is used one hundred thirty-four times in the New Testament and, unless this is the single exception, it never refers to the marriage bond. Marriage is not that kind of relationship anyway. The bondage which the Christian is not under is not the marriage bond.

Another word, "deo" is used forty-four times in the New Testament and refers to the marriage bond. It is used twice in this chapter to mean the marriage bond (verses 27,39). "Deo," not "doulou," refers to the marriage bond. Paul made a distinction and we must recognize it. When Paul told the Christian he or she is not under bondage he used the word "doulou." Therefore, he is not teaching that a deserted Christian is free to remarry and is free from the marriage bond. It means the Christian was never bound more to the mate than to Christ.

Is the deserted believer free to remarry? The answer is NO! Divorce and remarriage are not under consideration. These options are not open to the deserted Christian. The options open are to either be reconciled or else remain unmarried (verses 10,11). The Christian may not be able to prevent the separation, but that does not grant the Christian another reason for divorce. This is in protection of the sanctity of the institution of marriage.

Temporary Separation

We might add that inasmuch as God intends marriage to be for life, it should be evident that God does not sanction separation except it be with mutual consent and for a good cause. "*Let him depart*" does not necessarily mean an irreconcilable condition. It is not the same as a divorce. If separated, the Christian must remain unmarried or be reconciled, which would become impossible if remarriage was permitted.

The occasion for separation is not for a petty, trivial difference. While there is wisdom in a temporary separation to "clear the head" under some circumstances, such is not God's intent for marriage. But the major point we wish to stress here is that the passage, although misused at times to contend for error, does not permit divorce and remarriage with desertion as the grounds. There remains the one ground for divorce and that is fornication (Matthew five and nineteen).

The seriousness of these lessons cannot likely be overstressed. Those who live in adultery shall be lost eternally (Galatians 5:19; Colossians 3:5). Those who

would teach people that they can remain in an adulterous relationship should ask themselves if they think they can be saved while teaching people to remain in conditions that will cause the soul to be lost.

The early church disciplined those who were in adultery (First Corinthians 5). They sought to restore them through repentance, urging them to change their minds to the extent that they changed their lives. They were not taught, nor were brethren content to fellowship, those who remained in sin. Such discipline is essential lest the church become known as a haven for adulterers even as they continue in adultery. What influence can the church have toward sustaining the sanctity of the home and marriage if that which is taught undermines the very basic and fundamental elements of marriage as God gave it?

The home is a divine institution and the sexual morality of the nation is vital to its success. This depends upon our knowledge and respect for the law of God. If one contemplates marriage, be sure that both of you have the right attitude toward marriage, and both are marriageable according to "*thus saith the Lord.*" Otherwise, you enter into the dark despair of earthly sorrow and an eternity of hell.

We repeat the classes of those who may marry. (1) Those who have never married. (2) Those who have married but whose mate has died. (3) Those who have married, but have put away their mate because their mate was guilty of fornication. There is the way that is right and cannot be wrong. We would plead for all to respect God's law.

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NOTE: The three articles on marriage, divorce, and remarriage are not presented as the totality of comments that are needed and deserving, but to discuss the verses sufficiently to learn the will of God. Many questions and hypothetical situations can be raised that can be answered but only if we understand the basic principles first. We think these lessons present those principles.
JWB

Hebrew Salvation

First Corinthians 10:1-12 is our text and the length of it is too extensive to include here. Please read it from your own Bible. It refers to a momentous Old Testament sequence of events. One major point we need to recognize is that even though Israel had been baptized unto Moses in the cloud and sea and delivered from Egyptian bondage, all of those from twenty years old and upward were not allowed to enter the land of Canaan because they acted wickedly. There were two exceptions, Joshua and Caleb.

The Message

This is an example to us and teaches us that even after our baptism into Christ and deliverance from our past sins we can fail to reach our goal of heaven if we act as they did. The salvation of Israel from Egypt is specifically said to be an example or ensample. Actually, this refers to the fact that their salvation is a type or symbol and our salvation serves as the antitype. Recalling from other lessons, we remember that a type is something in the past of former ages that shows in outline something in the future or later age. The antitype answers to the image of the type.

God sent Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt. Exodus 4:19,29-31, *"And the Lord said unto Moses in Midian, Go, return to Egypt: for all the men are dead which sought thy life... And Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the children of Israel, and Aaron spake all the words which the Lord had spoken unto Moses, and did the signs in the sight of the people, and the people believed, and when they heard that the Lord had visited them they bowed their heads and worshipped."*

By the things that Moses and Aaron did and the things which the people heard from them the people believed that God would deliver them from their bondage. Were they delivered at that point of their faith? The answer is obvious that they were not. Faith alone in what God

through His messengers had revealed was not sufficient to their deliverance. Salvation for the Hebrews was not at the moment they first believed. This becomes very important as we study our own salvation.

The Plagues

Exodus chapters seven through twelve tell us of the plagues that befell Egypt. Were they delivered simply because God's power was greater than that of the Egyptian gods? Were they delivered the moment the final plague was over? Indeed not! Exodus 13_20-22, *"And they took their journey from Succoth and encamped in Etham, in the edge of the wilderness. And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night; he took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people."* This records how the people had now turned their backs against Egypt, but they were not delivered from Egypt yet. In fact, we next read of how Pharoah pursued them and they were fully aware that they were not yet free. Exodus 14:10-12, *"And when Pharoah drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them, and they were sore afraid, and the children of Israel cried out unto the Lord. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? Wherefore hast thou dealt this with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness."* They knew their deliverance was not yet a reality.

The Instructions What to Do

Then Moses gave them the word of direction from God. Exodus 14:13, *"And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show you today, for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more forever."* Even when this word of encouragement and direction was given them they were still not yet free from the hands of their captors and masters.

Moses and His Rod

Exodus 14:21-31 informs us what happened next. Moses was commanded to lift his rod over the Red Sea, the Lord parted the waters, Israel was commanded to march through the sea on dry land, the pillar of cloud going between them and the Egyptians until Israel was passed over. The Egyptians followed Israel into the gap and the Lord caused the walls of water to collapse and the enemy of Israel was destroyed. Chapter fifteen tells how the people praised God and rejoiced because now they were actually out of bondage. The Lord saved Israel that day (verse 30). What day did the Lord save Israel? It was the day when, as Paul described in First Corinthians ten, they were baptized in the cloud and the sea.

Not There Yet

Now that they were out of bondage and could properly be spoken of as enjoying salvation from their enemy, were they in the promised land that God offered just yet? Certainly not! Most of them would never get there because they acted wickedly as our text reveals. Even though they were saved from their former enslavement, they were not yet in the land that God had promised even in the days of Abraham. Their entrance into that land was dependent upon their making the journey after their baptism unto Moses. Those that were not faithful in that journey, even though delivered from Egypt, were not to receive the inheritance.

Like Our Salvation

Notice the fact of this being a type of our salvation. Israel was in bondage and God sent Moses with the word of deliverance. The people believed what Moses preached to them how God would deliver them. They were not saved yet simply upon their belief. They turned their backs on Egypt. But they were not saved yet and they realized it. They acknowledged God and were baptized in the cloud and sea, their enemy then being destroyed. They were saved that day from that bondage, but they were not in Canaan yet. Entrance into Canaan was dependent upon their faithfulness in journeying through the wilderness. Many fell by the way.

The picture of our salvation is not difficult to comprehend seeing how the salvation of the Hebrews is a type of our salvation. It is not a mere coincidence or accident that the two are alike. This was divinely designed. Paul says these things serve as an example or type to us. Consider the antitype.

The Bondage, Moses, and Christ

Their bondage was physical bondage in Egypt while ours is a spiritual bondage in sin. As God sent Moses to Israel to deliver them from Egypt, God sent His only begotten Son into the world to save man from sin (John 3:16; First Timothy 1:14). Christ brought the gospel (the good news of salvation) to mankind as Moses brought word of deliverance to Israel. The gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16). This is the reason the gospel must be preached (Mark 16:15,16). Romans 10:13-17 shows the necessity of the gospel. Salvation is the goal. But there is no salvation unless people call on the Lord. One cannot call until there is faith. One cannot believe until he hears. There can be no hearing until there is preaching. There can be no preaching without the preachers being sent. What is to be preached except the gospel? Without the gospel the chain that takes one from the state of being lost in sin to the blessedness of being saved simply does not exist!

Believe and Obey

The message must be heard and believed (Hebrews 11:6; John 8:24). But one is not saved the moment he believes any more than the Hebrews were saved the moment they believed the message of Moses that God would save them from Egypt. Man must turn his back on sin in repentance (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30). But man is not saved the moment he turns any more than the Hebrews were delivered the moment they began their march toward the sea with Egypt at their back. Man must acknowledge, or confess, Christ (Romans 10:9,10). But man is not saved yet, just as the Hebrews were not saved at the moment they acknowledged God. Man must obey what the gospel commands him to do which is to be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Just as Israel was baptized in the cloud and sea, and that was the day of

their salvation, so when man obeys in baptism, that is his day of salvation from past bondage. Just as Israel then had cause to rejoice once their baptism was accomplished, so man today has cause to rejoice once his baptism is accomplished (Acts 8:39; 16:34).

In Heaven Yet?

Is the baptized believer in heaven yet? Some would have you believe that once you are saved from your past sins that there is no way you can fail to reach heaven. Did all the Israelites reach Canaan? Certainly not! Nor is the baptized believer in heaven yet. Have his past sins been forgiven? Yes, they have. What must he now do, having been freed from his sins, and now looking to the promise to enter heaven? He must make the journey of life faithfully in Christ (Revelation 2:10) as Paul did (Second Timothy 4:6-8). It is most difficult to see how one can miss this simple and plain type-antitype relationship that God has provided us in Scripture.

Every example of conversion of which we read in the New Testament after the beginning of the kingdom, the church, on the first day of Pentecost after the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, follows the same pattern, and the pattern is like that of the Old Testament salvation of the Hebrews from Egypt.

The need of salvation from sin is evident. That God has sent us a Savior is also evident. Jesus Christ, His Son, is that Savior and Deliverer. He provided the way of salvation by being lifted up on the cross, from the tomb, and into heaven. He sends to mankind His invitation to come to Him and be blessed.

Man's part is that man, like Israel, must hear the good news of God's offer of salvation, learn the way of salvation that includes believing in Christ, repenting of sins, confessing faith in Christ, and being baptized into Christ. Our plea is that we all will come to a knowledge of the God's plan and be content to go that way. There is no other offered us.

* * * * *

Medium Churches

One of the more pleasurable blessings we have as grandparents is to enjoy our grandchildren coming home with us and spending the night. They look so precious when they are sleeping. And they can come out with some of the most marvelous comments when they are not even aware of it.

The Last Word

Several months ago when three of them spent the night with us, the next morning Tyler was asked how he was feeling. He said, "About medium." When we asked him what that meant he said, "That's in the center between hot and cold." Immediately I thought of the church in Laodicea that the Lord considered "*lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot.*"

The Lord was displeased with such a church. It makes we wonder if He finds any churches today with this same spiritual blight. When He does, do you think He is less displeased? What about the church where you attend? Is it a "medium church?" JWB

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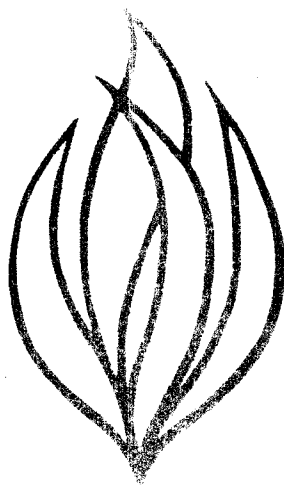
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*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*

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Faithful and True Sayings

Second Peter 3:18, *"But grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen."*

We shall study five passages of Scripture that will contribute to our spiritual growth in the knowledge of God's truth. These passages touch upon different subjects. Three come from First Timothy, one from Second Timothy, and the third from Titus. All three of these books are epistles from the apostle Paul to evangelists, Timothy or Titus. But the instructions given in these epistles include the teaching or doctrine that these evangelists were to teach to others. He said in First Timothy 4:11, *"These things command and teach."* Second Timothy 2:14, *"Put them in remembrance..."* First Timothy 6:2, *"These things teach and exhort."* Second Timothy 2:2, *"And the things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also."* Titus 2:1, *"But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine."*

All five of the passages we shall consider are introduced or described either as a faithful or a true saying. This is not to say that other sayings are not true and faithful, but are so defined to emphasize the importance of them.

What does it mean for a saying to be faithful and true? It means when we hear it or read it we are hearing and reading that which is dependable, reliable, something on which we can count with assurance and confidence. It is stable, objective, permanent, unstained with any error or untruth and defilement. These are things to be assuredly believed. There is no room for doubting their veracity.

First Timothy 1:15

First Timothy 1:15, *"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world*

to save sinners; of whom I am chief." This verse has to do with the mission of Christ.

Paul had been discussing his own life before and after entering the service of Christ. Formerly he had been a blasphemer, persecutor, and injurious. Now he was counted by the Lord for His service. The grace of God had been abundantly extended to him. This itself was consistent with the mission of Christ to this earth.

Christ came to save sinners. This is a basic and fundamental truth concerning the religion of Christ. Whatever else may be said of Him, this fact must be kept in the foreground. He came to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:10). Inasmuch as all have sinned and all are under sin, all need salvation. Since man cannot save himself, he needs a Savior. Christ is that Savior. Paul declares that our Savior, Redeemer, Deliverer from sin is Christ, the Son of God. First John 3:5, "*And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins, and in him is no sin.*" First John 2:2, "*And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*"

First Timothy 3:1

First Timothy 3:1, "*This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.*" This passage brings to mind the governmental arrangement of the Lord's kingdom, the church. Christ is the head, and the church is organized into independent local congregations that are overseen by qualified men called elders, bishops, shepherds, pastors, or presbyters. The church is served by deacons, with preachers and teachers, every member being a member of the body. There is no super ecclesiastical organization larger than the local church authorized in the New Testament.

The office of bishop is a work of delegated and limited, but important authority. It is an office in the sense that it is a distinctive work, and those who serve are charged with distinctive duties that demand the exercise of certain authority. We should emphasize that the work of an elder or eldership is more of a work than an honorary position and office. He, with his fellow

bishops, is to feed the flock the spiritual food they need. That food is the Word of God (Acts 20:28; First Peter 5:2). He must exercise the oversight of the flock, using his own judgment in matters of judgment and human opinion. He is charged with the watchcare of souls (Hebrews 13:15; First Timothy 3:5), convicting the gainsayers (Titus 1:9), and being and example to the flock (First Peter 5:3). This is called a good work, ordained of God, vital to the spiritual welfare of those in the church.

Those who so serve must do so willingly, with a pure motive, the desire to do the good this opportunity of service afford him (First Peter 5). The Scriptures exalt the work of elders. Men who are placed in this awesome work should pay attention to what they are supposed to do, being aggressive in fulfilling that work.

First Timothy 4:8,9

First Timothy 4:8,9, *"For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance."* This passage is one that instructs us how to set our priorities in life. The body is the temple of God (First Corinthians 6:19,20; 3:16). It is wrong to abuse the body. This is the reason it is sinful to overeat, drink alcoholic beverages, use harmful drugs, smoke nicotine, and other practices that are so evidently destructive to the welfare of the body. We must care for the body (Ephesians 5:29).

In many quarters there is great emphasis today on caring for the body with advice concerning diet, exercise, rest, and many healthful habits. Unfortunately, there does not seem to be a corresponding emphasis on the welfare of the spirit. People seem to be more concerned how they physically appear to others than how they spiritually appear before God. Paul is not condemning physical attentiveness and care for the body. But to attend to that and neglect the soul is to put first things second. Bodily exercise has a limited profit and is useful to physical vitality. But such is not nearly so important as godliness. The one may produce temporal benefits and results. But the other produces eternal blessings. This

faithful saying establishes what our priority in life should be. It is similar in that respect to First Peter 3:3,4, *"Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."*

While our society places such emphasis on the material, physical side of life, and constantly bombarding the public with the value of personal attractiveness and physical welfare, Paul is teaching the child of God not to be overly carried away in such things and not lose sight of that which is of greater value. When life ends, and it shall end, which will be of importance to us then?

There need not be an incompatible contest with caring for the body and caring for the soul. As mentioned, the body is the temple of God and caring for it does have spiritual connotations. We are aware that one's outward physical appearance can be a reflection of a heart of godliness (First Timothy 2:9,10). We dare not let lesser matters take priority over the more important ones.

Second Timothy 2:11-13

Second Timothy 2:11-13, *"It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; if we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself."* Consider a companion thought in Galatians 2:20, *"I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not It, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."* Paul is saying that life is to be lived as Christ would want us to live it. Our lives are to be sacrificed to the service of Christ. We are said to be living sacrifices (Romans 12:1,2). If we die with Him, we shall live. We are to give ourselves to Christlike living. This is the avenue to an abundant life here and a spiritual eternity with God.

When we become Christians we become dead to sin, which means we are separated from sin, being washed clean by His blood when we obey His command to be

clean by His blood when we obey His command to be baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4). The way to life is the way of death to sin. The way to reigning is the way that may cause suffering. Denying Him means our own denial by Him of us. To fail to believe changes nothing as to who Christ is. But Christ will not deny Himself and join us in denying Himself. He remains faithful to the truth regarding Himself that He is the Son of God, the Savior God has provided for mankind.

Second Timothy 3:12, *"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."* This is a hard saying. None like persecution. But following Christ will bring such upon us because the sinful world is hostile to Christ and those that love Him. But our hope abides in such promises as Romans 8:18, *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."*

While denying Christ produces our own denial, confessing Christ means He will confess us (Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10). Even if we are not faithful to Him, He remains faithful to Himself, His Word, His promises, His warnings. Our own personal unfaithfulness and disbelief will only bring our personal condemnation. Faithfulness will be rewarded with the crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

Titus 3:8

Titus 3:8, *"This is a faithful saying, and these thing I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men."* Being a Christian demands doing good works. The passage is placing emphasis on a sacred Christian duty, that of service and good works. Titus 2:14 tells us that we are to be a kind of people who are zealous of good works. We are to do as Jesus did, and He went about doing good (Acts 10:38). Having become Christians, we are to be what we profess to have become.

Galatians 6:10, *"As we have therefore opportunity let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."* This is an admonition applicable to

both individual Christians and to churches inasmuch as it was written to the churches of Galatia. It stresses the importance of doing good to those who are in need.

In Matthew twenty-five when Jesus was picturing the judgment scene, in verses thirty-one through forty-six, He tells who shall be blessed and who shall be sent away. There will be a great separation of the two and their destinies far removed one from the other. But it is somewhat significant that this particular teaching shows that the distinction of the two groups, the ones on the left or right, was not made on the basis of the evil they had done, but on the good they either did or failed to do. This does not mean evil deeds shall not be taken into account. But in this particularly teaching evil deeds are not brought into the matter. Only those deeds of good works or the lack of them are under consideration.

It follows harmoniously with that teaching He gave so often that the greatest in His kingdom are those who serve. This is a teaching in which we can have confidence, and it should serve as a warning as well lest we be negligent of doing good works.

Each of the five passages contributes to our ability to focus on Christ and His will. With this expanded knowledge we should strive to live accordingly. These are divinely given teachings and exhortations necessary to be known and applied in the process of growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior.

* * * * *

The Modern Dance and the Christian

There are those, both in and out of the church, that do not consider this to be an important subject. But we insist it is important because the Scriptures make it important. We are sorry that so many professed Christians have adopted the sinful ways of the world to

the extent that sound teaching regarding this subject is no longer welcomed by them and their dancing partners. First Corinthians 10:31 makes it important. *"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."* It matters what a person does. It matters whether what he does brings glory to God or not. While we realize that questioning the practice of dancing is not the pathway to popularity in a depraved society, we could care less what is the path to popularity. We care more what is the path that God would have us walk.

Of What Do We Speak?

We are not concerned about dancing of the kind of which we read in Exodus 15:20, done by women alone, in the day of rejoicing over deliverance from bondage. We are not talking about the individual dance of David of Second Samuel 6:12-14 in his day of rejoicing over the ark of the covenant entering the city of Jerusalem. We are talking about dancing that is based on sexual appeal, sexual emotions, men with women, the modern dance of the gyrations of the body in sensual fashion, practiced in the ballrooms, discos, high school proms, television exposures, sensual bodily movements set to music, even exhibited at parties in homes of people, some of whom even call themselves Christians.

The most charitable, lenient, favorable thing that can be said for the modern dance is that it is highly questionable conduct for a Christian. The very fact that many ask, "Is there any harm in it?" is an admission that it is a doubtful practice. Romans 14:23 forbids doing that which cannot be done with good conscience. While there be many who care little what is right and wrong or what God teaches regarding this theme, and there are many others who have their consciences seared by their desires to imitate the world, possibly there are some who can be reached with the truth because they still have some question in their minds regarding its propriety for the child of God, even though some who have these doubts still dance.

This dancing is characteristic of those who are wicked and defiant toward God. Job 21:11-15, *"They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They*

take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave. Therefore, they say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? And what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?" When we dance we leave this same impression on others about our attitude toward God.

Consider the Crowd

Sometimes a person can discover the way they are going by taking a good look at the crowd with whom they are traveling. Matthew 7:17-20, *"Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit... Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."* What is the fruit of the modern dance? Who will be honest enough and with open mind inquire fairly to answer this question? While likely the social butterflies and the aspirants of worldly acclaim probably will not honestly consider the question, hopefully, someone who reads and teaches the Word of God will bring it to the attention of both young and old.

What It Creates

The modern dance creates evil desires, desires that cannot be satisfied morally and legitimately outside of marriage. It creates lust and impure passions. It condones the unchaste handling of bodies of those of the opposite sex. It often is associated with immodest attire and certainly lascivious movements of the body. It is very often the prelude to overt sexual immorality, fornication, and adultery. It has been described as the initiation course and training for prostitution. It provokes jealousy, marital strife, and leads to divorce. How can anybody who says they are Christians fellowship such evil works of darkness (Ephesians 5:11)?

Worldliness

Worldliness refers to the sinfulness of this world. First Thessalonians 5:22 reads, *"Abstain from all appearance of evil."* First John 2:15 forbids the love of this world. Romans 12:1,2 teaches the Christian not to conform to

the ways of this world. James 1:27 warns against being stained and spotted with the world. Many who say they are Christians need to ask if these passages really have any meaning to them. How can a person who claims to be honest read such divine admonitions and ignore their applications? How can "Christian" young people and their parents read these things, even leaders of the church read them, and go ahead in condoning the modern dance? Have they no sensitivity to truth whatever?

Lasciviousness

Dancing is wrong because it is lascivious. Lasciviousness means that which provokes lewd emotions, actions, impure thoughts, that which has as its basic appeal the sexual impulse illicitly provoked and immorally satisfied. Galatians 5:19ff teaches lasciviousness is serious enough to keep one out of God's kingdom. Second Timothy 2:22 urges, "*Flee youthful lusts...*" How does one justify calling himself or herself a child of God having been taught these truths, but then engaging in the very thing that provokes lust and immorality? Titus 2:11,12 says that the Christian is to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this world. Can one read these words from inspired pens and have no concern about doing the very things that defy these teachings? Evidently some can because this is what they do. But are they acceptable to God in it? There is no person alive or dead that can fit the modern dance into the characteristics that are to belong to Christians!

Dancing encourages immodesty in dress and manners. Those who make their living by dancing admit that the greater the modesty of the dancer the poorer the dancer. To be a good partner in the dance one must be as one surrendered to their partner. There must be a personal abandonment of restraint. The movements, positions, steps, entwining of the bodies, even the attire worn, is best when it is sexually suggestive. As one tosses himself or his partner about, the indecent exposure of the body is obvious to every onlooker and dancer. If such is not vulgar, please tell me what sort of movements and positions could be called vulgar! Does vulgar have any

meaning to the modern dancer? Revelling and lasciviousness are sins. Dancing is both of them.

The sex drive is one of the strongest drives in the human body, and strongest in youth, those most given to modern dancing. The sex drive is not evil of itself. God gave the human such desires and rightly understood and rightly used and satisfied they are holy, pure, and proper. God has also provided for the moral satisfaction of these drives in marriage, in the intimate relationship of husband and wife. The arousal and provocation of such emotions when they cannot be morally satisfied is sinful. How can a Christian simply harden his heart and close his eyes to these realities? How can parents and church leaders, even elders and preachers, be complacent in the face of such things in this conflict between the modern dance and the will of Christ? How can husbands and wives ignore this element of the dance and say they follow Christ?

Sin Set To Music

The liberties permitted on the dance floor would not be tolerated elsewhere. A man embracing and twisting around the body of his neighbor's wife would cause real problems, until it is set to music. Then somehow it becomes an acceptable sport. The entwining of the limbs, the bodily contact, the handling of the body but set to music is considered proper by some people. But you remove the music and it will cause a fight. The modern dance is the fine art of covering with music the indelicate, immodest, and indecent attitudes and postures between men and women. If these things did not exist in the dance, the dance would find no appeal.

Flee, Not Flirt, With Sin

Certainly dancing leads one into temptation. It is designed and intended to provoke temptation. Can a Christian sincerely pray not to be led into temptation and then attend the dance where the prime action is for that very purpose? Dancing ruins the Christian's influence as a Christian. It enhances his reputation as a hypocrite. It places a stumblingblock before others.

There is not the first righteous and pure thing that can be said for it.

While those who create and design the dances readily admit the sexual appeal of it, now and then you find some simple minded parent, or worldly minded youth, who denies it. Some offer the most lame excuses trying to make this sin acceptable. They call it recreation. They do not know the difference between recreation and dissipation of the body and spirit. One can find recreation that is not stained with impurities. Those who dance are not primarily interested in it because of recreation. They are lying and deceiving nobody, probably not even themselves.

Such Excuses

Some say it is better for the youth to be on the dance floor than in a parked car. Is this the only choice youths have? Some say it will be all right if chaperoned. How do you chaperone sin and make it righteous? Who chaperones after the dance is over and the emotions already aroused? Can you chaperone the mind of another? Such tripe is unworthy of intelligent people to offer as an excuse for what they want to do regardless of the will of God.

But now and then one hears somebody say that dancing does not affect them sexually. If it does not, then they are not getting from the dance what is intended by the dance. It may be true of the very young whose sexual sensitivities are not mature enough as yet, but who are pushed into the activity by peers or fool parents. With those who are older they are most likely lying, or they are not all male and female. Restrict dancing to all male with male partners or all female with female partners among those who are normal and see how successful is your party! It will be a flop, unless you are entertaining a group of perverts. Furthermore, even if you are not affected, can you be so sure your partner is not? Have we not responsibility toward others? With normal people such is simply not the case and the excuse not to be believed. The truth is that dancing provokes within people the very thing that some would deny, but

who are determined to continue practicing, God's will notwithstanding.

Woe To The Preacher

But let a gospel preacher preach God's truth on the subject, or let some true Christian oppose the modern dance and some wiggling creep will accuse him of being dirty minded. This is an accusation sometimes made by those of dishonest mind, who themselves care not for truth, but only their own appetites. But are we to believe that the most loyal, sacrificial, truly pious, righteous, Biblically informed, dedicated Christians are the only ones who are dirty minded people, while the dancer and his twisting partners are the pure ones, wholesome, and worthy of imitation? Who can believe such nonsense as produced by the defenders of sin, the modern dance?

I have even been told by leaders of the church that the modern dance is all right because there was dancing at the return of the prodigal son. Have such defenders of the dance no shame whatever?

Some Who Don't Defend The Dance

Such excuses on behalf of the dance are never made by professional dancers, nor the choreographers, or dance designers. They readily admit the truth of its basic nature and sexual appeal. They do not deny the charges against it. Many prostitutes readily admit they were led toward their way of life by the dance. They do not deny its appeal. Some rather approve of the charges against it because this shows they are being successful in what they intend to accomplish by the dance. Just listen to the songs, the lyrics, and observe the actions and see if you think this is the kind of conduct that brings glory to God! See if you honestly think this is what Jesus approves!

The worldly church member is the major defender of the dance against the accusation that it is sinful. Many church members are misguided, untaught, spiritually weak, hard headed, stubborn, and ambitious to be accepted by the world at all costs. Their passion for popularity has crowded out their professed loyalty to

Christ. The alien sinner is not fooled by the excuses offered by the "dancing Christians." Neither are faithful Christians fooled by it. Most important of all, God is not fooled either.

Christians Don't Dance

Christians should not participate in the dance, not attend the dance, have nothing to do with the promotion of the dance because dancing is sinful. The dancing foot is not attached to a praying knee. The two activities are incompatible in the same life.

We wonder what has happened to the leadership of the church which has evidently caved to the demands of the sinful members who dance. Where are the preachers, these weak, powder-puff cowards who are more insipid clergymen than gospel preachers? I'll tell you where they are. They are occupying many of the pulpits of churches that once stood for truth, but have become so permissive, liberal, arrogant, and conceited that truth is no longer their major. They prefer being paid their salaries, not for what they preach but for what they won't preach.

We appeal on the basis of the revealed will of God, the Bible, for brethren to once again refrain from such practices, and become the advocates of righteousness by opposing the modern dance, especially among us. Surely, example, influence, thought and action should mean more to the Christian than to allow himself or herself to be carried along by the world. If we really care for the truth, for our souls, and the souls of others, dancing will not be a part of our lives.

* * * * *

P.S.

We might add just this observation regarding preaching with respect to the modern dance. When I began preaching in 1952, I did not know one preacher who would even attempt to defend this evil practice. Now, it hard to find many who still stand for the truth regarding it. It is another indication of the liberal digression that has so diseased the church. JWB

Why Does The Gospel Not Save?

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation, to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith, as it is written, The just shall live by faith." (Romans 1:16,17).

At first, our subject may appear to question what Paul has affirmed in this passage just quoted. Paul tells us the gospel saves, and we are asking, "Why does the gospel not save?" But we are certainly not questioning Paul's statement.

Let us begin by looking at the spiritual condition of those in sin. Jesus said, *"Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin."* (John 8:34). Paul wrote in Romans 6:16-18, *"Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness."* Again, Ephesians 2:1, Paul says that those in sin are *"dead"* in sins, spiritually separated from God. In Second Timothy 2:24-26 he talks about those held captive of the devil.

To understand the condition of the sinner is to see his helplessness, his need for salvation, his inability to save himself, and his need of a Savior. We cannot save ourselves by ourselves. *"For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast."* (Ephesians 2:8,9). We are not saved by our own works of righteousness, but by the mercy of God (Titus 3:3-5). Nothing is more evident than man's need of a Savior.

The Savior

God has provided the Savior. *"This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."* (First Timothy 1:15). Salvation is *"in Christ."* (Second Timothy 2:10). Does God save by some kind of direct operation upon us? Or does God use some means and operate indirectly through that means to save us? This is an all-important question in learning how God saves man. If God uses a direct operation, there is no need for the gospel. If He saves directly without means then all would be saved because God is not willing that any should perish (Second Peter 3:9). But all are not saved nor will be saved. If God saves directly, and any person is lost, it would be God's failure to directly operate upon him.

But God saves through an indirect power and plan that includes the exercise of man's power of choice and volition. That power is the gospel. This plan respects the nature of man as God has created him. Paul tells us the gospel is the power of God to save, a power of evidence, persuasion, and conviction. We are saved by the gospel (First Corinthians 15:1-4).

The Gospel

The power of the gospel is found in what the gospel reveals. Just what does the gospel tell us? It reveals the *"righteousness of God,"* that is, God's plan for making man righteous or justified. *"All thy commandments are righteousness."* (Psalm 119:172). In the gospel we find God's commandments that men are to obey whereby they come to the salvation God offers to give. The *"righteousness of God"* does not refer to a virtuous attribute of God, but to God's way of making man justified before God.

Theoretically, there are two ways man can be counted righteous. One, and this is an impossibility, man would be righteous if he was sinless. But we can rule that out. *"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:23). Two, he can be made righteous by the faith of Christ. *"Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe, for there is no difference."* (Romans 3:22). We can be saved by being forgiven of sins. *"Blessed are they*

whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." (Romans 4:7,8).

One of the problems the Jews of the first century had, and that many today still have, is expressed in Romans 10:3. *"For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God."* Men were determined to follow their own plan rather than God's plan, a plan of which they were ignorant. It is still the handicap of man now. They want to go to heaven, but they want to go their own way rather than the way God has revealed. But the gospel reveals that way.

Unrighteousness Revealed

The gospel also reveals the unrighteousness of man. Notice again verse eighteen. God's wrath is against the ungodliness and unrighteousness of man. Man's guilt of sin is firmly established. The very death of Christ declares the unrighteousness of man. *"For when we were yet without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die, yet peradventure for a righteous man some would 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).

The gospel also reveals God's wrath against sin. In this same Roman letter Paul wrote of the *"day of wrath,"* (Romans 2:5), referring to the day of judgment. Romans 6:23 tells us the wages of sin is death, that is, spiritual separation from God.

What Else Is Needed?

Seeing how man sins, and cannot save himself, but needs a savior, and Christ is the only Savior, and the gospel reveals God's way of saving man, why does the gospel not save? There is no magic in merely preaching the gospel. The gospel must be heard, but that is not sufficient. The gospel is sufficient, but the hearing of it is not sufficient. The gospel must be believed, It is the

power of God to save them that believe. It also must be obeyed (Second Thessalonians 1:8). Those who obey not the gospel shall be lost. Failure to believe and obey the gospel neutralizes its power to save a person. Faith can be made void (Romans 4:14). The commandments of God can be made of none effect (Matthew 15:6). Christ can become of none effect (Galatians 5:4). The power of the gospel to save produces benefit only to those who hear, believe, and obey. The blessings are conditional. Christ is the author of salvation to them that obey Him (Hebrews 5:9). Proof that salvation is conditional is stressed when Peter preached, *"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."* (Acts 10:34,35). One can be accepted, but he must fear God and work God's righteousness, keep His commandments. It is conditional.

Then why do people refuse to obey the gospel? This is the puzzle of the ages. Whatever may be offered as a reason or excuse, it is the influence and work of the devil. *"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."* Second Corinthians 4:3,4). Refusal to obey the gospel is the result of the work of the one who seeks man's destruction. *"Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil walketh about as roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."* (First Peter 5:8). How does the devil do this?

Satan's Devices

There are many avenues that Satan uses to keep man lost. Some are ignorance, pride, worldly wisdom, love of sin, a closed mind, and a hardened heart. Jesus said, and He was quoting from Isaiah, *"By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand, and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive. For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."* (Matthew 13:14,15). When Jesus was praying over Jerusalem, He said, *"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that*

killst 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." (Emphasis, JWB). (Matthew 23:37). Jesus would have saved them, but they just would not be saved.

Other ways that keep people from obeying the gospel are ways of deception through false doctrines, false security, not having a ready mind to receive the truth, modernism, liberalism, denominationalism, creedalism. The cares of this world choke the word among many (Luke 8:14). Some are willing to believe a lie (Second Thessalonians 2:11). But regardless as to the how or what keeps one from believing and obeying the gospel, those who do not are lost, and shall remain lost until they do. People who have been taught to wait for some kind of direct operation of the Holy Spirit, or expect some strange event or weird experience, will wait forever. They may have some such thing, but that is not the way God saves.

His Word Does Not Fail To Save

There is a passage in Isaiah 55:10,11 that used to bother me no little. It seemed to contradict Paul's affirmation that the gospel saves. But when we see clearly the full truth about the way of salvation, we see what Paul and Isaiah meant. *"For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth. It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."*

I would go preach in a gospel meeting the best I could, teach the gospel as clearly as I could do, and I knew that people understood their responsibility to God. Yet, they would not respond to the invitation of Christ to be saved. I would reason that the seed was sown and possibly later it would bring forth converts, and this was true. But the gospel was designed to save and few were saved. But the word would not return void. It would accomplish its purpose. How could this be?

I was made to realize by a wise teacher (H.A.Dixon) that the gospel saves, but it will also condemn. We shall be judged by the words of Jesus (John 12:48) in that last day. The gospel reveals God's righteousness, but it also reveals God's wrath against sin. It contains promises, but it also contains warnings of punishment to the unbeliever and disobedient. It is preached so people can make a choice and a decision what to do about Christ. It will accomplish one or the other result for each one. It will either save, or it will condemn.

Knowing that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation makes the preaching of it an imperative duty. But just preaching it does not mean that all who hear will be saved. It has the power to save **IF** believed and obeyed. *"For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them, but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it."* (Hebrews 4:2). That the gospel does not save is no fault of the gospel, but the fault of those who hear but reject it.

God offers us salvation from sin and salvation in heaven through Christ. Salvation in heaven is dependent upon salvation from sin. He calls us by the gospel to be saved (Second Thessalonians 2:14). Our sins are forgiven when we hear, believe, and obey. Medicine will cure a disease only if applied. The patient cannot expect to recover from his illness if he refuses to use the prescribed remedy. Neither can a person expect to be saved if he does not apply God's remedy from sin. God is willing to save (Second Peter 3:9). But each one must be willing to be saved, God's way. Otherwise, the gospel cannot, will not, does not, save.

* * * * *

There is a great need for Christian people to speak out on the moral and religious issues facing our nation. Some are intimidated when accused of meddling in politics if they speak out on abortion, homosexuality, violence, dishonesty in government, and other immoralities. That such sins are political policy does not mean this is politics. Rather is it truth versus error. Speak out! LOUD!

The Word of Angels

Hebrews 2:1-4, *"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?"*

God's mercy is manifested to us in many ways. Among them is the kindly but firm warnings that we read from time to time in Scripture. The way God warns is powerful, clear, precise, penetrating, and leaves no room for doubt. Such is the nature of our text. The passage is a divine message sent from heaven to which we will take heed if we be wise.

The word *"therefore"* that is at the first of the text indicates a conclusion is about to be drawn from what has been said in chapter one. We read there how God had spoken to man through the ages in a variety of ways at various times. Now He speaks His will to man through His Son, Jesus Christ. The writer speaks of the glory of Christ who is heir of all things, having all authority by virtue of His Sonship. He is the One by whom the worlds were made. Verse ten teaches the heavens are the work of His hands and He laid the foundation of the earth. The eternal nature of the Son is presented in verse twelve by the words, *"thy years shall not fail."* Even though the heaven and earth shall perish, *"thou remainest."* We also read of the brightness of the glory of God and how the Son is the express image of Deity. He sustains all things, rules and reigns at the right hand of God.

Chapter one also teaches His superiority over the angels (verse 4), being better than the angels, having a more excellent name than they, being called God's Son, begotten of God (verse 5). Even the angels worshipped

Him (verse 6), and are His ministers. God never gave such rank and authority to angels as He has His Son (verse 13). No angel is called God (verse 8).

All of this being true, we should give the more earnest heed (sincere, alert fidelity and attentiveness) to the things which we have heard regarding Christ. Why? Lest we let them slip, fall away from them, apostatize, and experience the disastrous results. The book of Hebrews was written to exalt Christ and to prevent apostasy back into that which had already been proven inferior and less beneficial than Christ. The writer argues that if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, meaning it was true, faithful, reliable, dependable, and fulfilled, how much more so is the word of the One who is superior to angels.

Consider the Words of Angels Past

Just how steadfast were the words spoken by angels? Let us go back and review some of the revelation of the Old Testament and messages that were given to men from the Lord through angels.

In Genesis eighteen we read of the visit by three men to Abraham in the plains of Mamre. They told him that he and Sarah would have a son. Even though Abraham was at that time well stricken in years, as was Sarah, and she had been barren all her childbearing years, the question is raised, "*Is there anything too hard for the Lord?*" Was their word steadfast? In time the promised son, Isaac, was born. Can there be any question about the reliability of the word Abraham received from these three men who were identified as angels?

In Genesis thirty-two we read where Jacob wrestled and conversed with an angel just prior to his reunion with Esau. Jacob had fled his home some years earlier in fear for his life. Of course, some of the problems he had brought upon himself. But now as he returns to his homeland and the news that his brother Esau was coming to meet him with many armed men was a very threatening message. Even though he returned quite prosperous, with family and herds, he knew not the mind of Esau.

Jacob prayed and was reassured of God's preservation. It was at that time that God changed his name to Israel (prince of God), and the angel blessed him. Was the angel's word steadfast? The remaining part of Jacob's life gives us answer to that question. His life proves the certainty and reliability of what he learned from the angel.

The angel Gabriel announced to Zacharias the coming birth of a son who was to named John. He was John the Baptist (Luke 1:13). At that time Zacharias and Elizabeth had no children and they also were well stricken in years. Zacharias asked for a sign that such an event would take place. He was made dumb until the child was to be born. Things came to pass precisely as the angel had spoken. The word of angels proved steadfast.

Gabriel also announced to Mary the coming birth of Jesus. Mary was a virgin and yet, without knowledge of man, she would bear a son. Even His name was specified. His mission was noted as that of Savior. While she wondered at such things when she was told them, all things took place and the prophecies were fulfilled just as the word of the angel had spoken.

Angels and the Old Law

In Galatians 3:19 we learn that the law of Moses was ordained by angels., It was called a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. It was the temporary authority for Israel until the coming of the will of Christ. The law was fulfilled in Christ (Matthew 5:17,18; Luke 24:44). Again, the word of angels proved steadfast because the law was taken out of the way, being nailed to the cross.

The writer of Hebrews not only used the word of angels as the reason to take heed, but noted also the fact that every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward which proved the word of angels. To receive a just recompense of reward means to receive proper compensation and repayment for what was done. There are many examples especially in the Old Testament of such things. Consider the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). We also read in Second Peter of the flood at the time of

Noah, as well as the evil ways of Balaam. Genesis nineteen records the destruction of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Leviticus ten tells us of the death of Nadab and Abihu when they acted without proper authority. Even Moses was denied entrance into the land of Canaan because he took part credit to himself for providing Israel water they needed and struck the rock which God had said to only speak to it (Numbers 20). Then there was Uzzah's transgression in touching the ark, which was forbidden except to the one authorized to transport it (Second Samuel 6). The fall of Northern Israel and Southern Judah into Assyrian and Babylonian captivities also showed how disobedience received a just recompense of reward. Later the fall of Babylon, the wicked destroyer of Judah, fell beneath the invasion of Persia. Throughout the Scriptures we read of individuals, families, nations that proved repeatedly, *"The way of the transgressor is hard."* (Proverbs 13:15). Transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward. This long Biblical record shows to us God's wrath against sin and the certain fruits of it.

A Conclusion

What can we conclude from this vast amount of information on such matters? When one realizes the record of God's punishment against evil and the evildoers, this should provoke within us a more earnest heed to what He has declared through His Son. When we realize that even that which was revealed through angels was faithful and true, that their warnings came to pass, and their words fulfilled, and you couple that with the realization that Christ, the Son of God, is superior to the angels, how much more should we give heed and pay attention to what Christ has taught us!

In the Mounts

The same principle of His superiority is taught in the event at the mount where Christ was transfigured before His apostles. Matthew 17:5, *"While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him."*

It is also emphasized in Matthew 12:41,42, *"The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and behold, a greater than Jonas is here. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; for she came from the uttermost part of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here."*

Hebrews 10:26-31, *"For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses; of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."*

God lovingly warns just as He lovingly invites (Matthew 11:28-30). *"Come unto me, all ye that labour 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."* Shall we take heed and live? Or shall we ignore and be damned? Each one must make his personal choice.

* * * * *

It is hard to fight error and not become bitter and hardened by the conflict. All things are toughened by opposition, and we develop a defensive armor to ward off attacks. Softness may be a mark of the sunshine patriots, but we may expect the veterans of many battles to have a few scars and be of tougher fiber. The old pioneer preachers who fought the battles against sectarianism were no "cream puffs" as to character, but we are persuaded that they continued to live for God and the church in spite of their battles. J.A.McNutt

When Not To Fly Off The Handle

You may have heard this humorous story but it bears repeating. Two men were sitting on a fence by the road and along came a meat truck. Its back door flew open and a great load of balogna fell out. Three crows were flying nearby and saw it and quickly descended upon the balogna. They proceeded to enjoy a long, free feast on the meat. After a while they decided to fly away, but had eaten so much they could not get airborne. They saw a hoe leaning against the fence and decided to climb the handle and launch their flight from there to help them get some altitude. The first climbed up, flew off, but exploded. Then came the second and did likewise. Then the third did as the other two. The two men watched all of this and one finally spoke and suggested the whole episode had a moral in it. The moral he suggested simply is, "Don't fly off the handle when you are full of balogna." Sounds like the man had some real wisdom, doesn't it?

The Last Word

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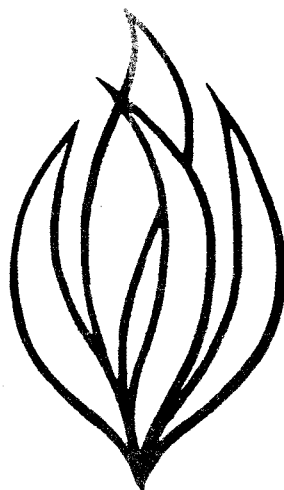
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A Burning Fire



*"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 Shepherd Psalm

A psalm is a sacred composition in the form of a song or a poem. It is an expression of great devotion. Holy thoughts are expressed in sublime and loving language. The Psalms of the Old Testament embrace a wide variety of thoughts. They range from a very positive to a very negative expression. Some of them comfort and encourage while others motivate, even express condemnation. You find some that express frustration and discouragement. The psalm can either be sung or read. The favorite of the Psalms of the Bible for so many is the twenty-third.

My God and I

God is mentioned twelve times. The personal pronouns, I, me, mine, are found seventeen times. This give us a clue to the nature of the psalm. It emphasizes the very personal relationship that the psalmist had with God, and that anyone who is a child of God can also have. It portrays divine care and concern for the individual.

There are fifteen phrases that compose this psalm and each has its own distinction and significance. Each one can be considered as a verse in the hymn with different emphasis, yet collectively, they form a majestic expression of the God-man relationship.

A reading of Psalm twenty-three will be helpful at this point. Having done that, let us turn our attention to each of the phrases with brief observations of each.

1 - Faith in the Shepherd

The psalm is a song of faith. "*The Lord is my shepherd.*" John ten presents Jesus as the Good Shepherd caring for His sheep. This is in itself a glorious thought that the Lord watches over us. He is mine and I am His. We are like sheep in need of the care of another. We have that care in the Person of the Christ. Who could desire to have as our Shepherd more than the Lord's Son?

2 - Providence

It is also a song of providence. "*I shall not want.*" The psalmist was aware that there be many in the world who lack even those things which are necessary to the sustenance of life. But such a lack would not be his to experience because the Lord would provide. Is this not essentially what the Lord Jesus promised in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:25-34)? We must not forget, however, that this is conditional. We are to seek His kingdom and righteousness first. We have no reason to expect the providential care of Deity if we neglect the priorities He has established for us in life.

3 - Contentment

The twenty-third Psalm is also a song of contentment. "*He maketh me lie down in green pastures.*" I am told that it is a strange thing about sheep that they will not lie down unless they have a sense of freedom from fear, tension, and friction. If they are subject to predators and pests, or suffer from hunger, they are disturbed, restless, wandering, and nervous. Only when they have the contentment that can be theirs by the work of the shepherd will they be at ease and lie down. Our shepherd finds the fields of green for us and protects us so we can be content, calm, serene, being constantly aware of His abiding presence and oversight of us.

4 - Peace

This psalm is one of peace and tranquility. "*He leadeth me beside the still waters.*" Jesus is called the Prince of Peace. The peace that He brought to this world is peace between man and God. He also teaches us how to have peace with one another. Another form of peace that is vital to a useful life is peace within oneself. When one is in the right relationship with God he does enjoy peace within himself and with justification.

Our shepherd takes us to the quieting, soothing, refreshing waters of life. Again we are told that a peculiarity of sheep is that they are hesitant, if not totally obstinate, to drink from swift and rushing water.

It frightens them. But they find satisfaction and peace where the water runs clean, pure, deep, and still.

5 - Life

Psalm twenty-tree is a song of life. "*He restoreth my soul.*" Who has not been cast down, dejected, suffering from the feelings of rejection, tasting defeat and tempted to bitterness, not having sufficient strength within himself? As sheep are subject to various kinds of attackers and are prey, so are those who live in this world but who follow the Lord. There are times when we need uplifting and encouragement. Here is where we find it. It comes from our Shepherd. He can and does restore that which has fallen.

6 - Leadership

We are reading a song of leadership. "*He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*" The invitation of our Lord Jesus is, "*Follow me.*" Where He leads, if we follow, will be to our benefit and His glory. He is our example and as Peter taught, we should follow in His steps (First Peter 2:21). Not all who lead will lead in the right way or the right direction. Christ warned against blind leaders of the blind and how they both fall into the ditch. But we can have utmost confidence in where our Lord leads us. There are paths of unrighteousness that are open to us and we are constantly tempted by the temptations of Satan to go that way. Because our Shepherd cares for us He will never lead us anywhere to our destruction. If we will follow Him we shall be led in the way of truth, the path of righteousness, and will successfully make our journey through this life that eventually leads into eternal glory in heaven.

7 - Confidence

We also have before us a song of confidence in the face of certain dark realities of life and death. "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...*" Life is brief, and uncertain. James describes it as but a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away (James 4:14). It is appointed unto man once to die

(Hebrews 9:27). Death is as certain to come as life has existed. None shall escape it. Even so, in this dark hour of unknowns and uncertainties, we can be confident because we know that this life is not all there is to our existence. We rightly considered death as a doorway through which we must pass into something greater. Second Corinthians 5:1,6-8, *"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens... Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord; (For we walk by faith, not by sight). We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."*

8 - Courage

This is a song of courage. *"I will fear no evil."* Hebrews 13:6 teaches, *"The Lord is my helper and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."* Even though there be many storms of many kinds that break all around us, we shall not have to be broken by them. We can courageously overcome them. We may not always be able to rid the portion of the world where we live of the evil that is so prevalent. But what we cannot overcome we have the power to endure (First Corinthians 10:13). With the assurance of ultimate victory for eternity that we have been promised by Creator and Judge, we have no cause to fear what may come our way. The greater our faith the less will be the sense of insecurity and fear. We will face each day with courage.

9 - Companionship

One fathomable thought of the psalm is that this is a song of companionship with God. *"For thou art with me..."* This is really a summary and comprehensive phrase that encompasses the major theme of the entire psalm. Psalm twenty-three has been rightly called the "I-Thou" psalm. We have fellowship with Deity, one of man's greatest and most undeserved blessings. Uphill, downhill, in good times, bad times, we are never alone. As the song says, *"If Jesus goes with me I'll go anywhere."* When we walk in the light as He is in the light we shall maintain this fellowship (First John 1:7).

10 - Comfort

This is a song of comfort. "*Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*" The rod and staff are implements and tools of the shepherd that are used in leading the sheep, gently directing them rather than for driving and whipping them. These instruments are often used by the shepherd to retrieve a sheep which may have fallen into danger. It was used to drive away invaders of the flock. It served as his weapon. It was used to discipline the sheep and gently nudge them along as the shepherd would take them from one grazing place to another. He even used it to count the sheep and keep up with each one lest through oversight or wandering some sheep be separated from the flock. Is it not comforting to know that we have One who is so attentive and caring for each of us?

11 - Support

This is a song of favor and blessing. "*Thou anointest my head with oil.*" Anointing one with oil was a manner of appointment, setting one aside and apart, making one special. The shepherd might also anoint his sheep with ointment to help kill pests, flies, bugs, and even assist in curing diseases. It could be used as an antidote for that which would aggravate the sheep and heal its wounds. Our Shepherd has made us special and we are a set apart people.

13 - Gratitude

Psalm twenty-three is an expression of gratitude and joy for the bounty of blessings of the past and present. "*My cup runneth over.*" Recognition is given to the Lord as the giver of every good and perfect gift, the provider of the abundant life. It is an expression of appreciation.

In one sense this phrase carries a special meaning to me personally. In 1963 I was privileged to preach in a gospel meeting at the congregation where I attended as a boy. My Dad was then an elder of that church which had been established by his father and grandfather. The final Sunday of the meeting, which proved to be less than a week and a half before my father suddenly died, upon returning home from the morning service in which I was

privileged to preach and my brother had lead the prayer, my father was so filled with thanksgiving and gratitude that he is reported to have sat on the bed and simply quoted, "*My cup runneth over.*" Nobody will even know how grateful I am that I had a small part in making that a great day in the life of my father. He did not have an abundance of this world's goods although we always had what was adequate and more. But he considered his blessings and counted his cup as running over. Is not this psalm a sincere and heartfelt praise for the blessings God has given which we have the privilege to enjoy even in this life?

14 - For the Future

But it is also a song that contemplates and anticipates blessings in the future as well as the past and present. "*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.*" The psalmist faced the future with confidence and optimism because he knew the source of his blessings past and present, and he knew that God not only had blessed, and does bless, but will bless. Paul wrote in Romans 11:22, "*Behold the goodness... of God.*" The psalm takes note of what the faithful child of God can expect.

15 - Immortality

Finally, the psalm is a song of immortality. "*And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*" The knowledge of life after this, the promise that life will be with God and that it shall never end, is that which belongs to those who are in the Lord's sheepfold. The sheepfold of Christ is His church over which He is Shepherd.

Would that we all would have the Lord as our glorious Shepherd. Christ is the door into the sheepfold. There is one Shepherd and one fold (John 10:10). Make this psalm personal and applicable to you by coming to the Christ., and you can repeat it with the same conviction as the psalmist who was guided by the holy Spirit to write it.

* * * * *

The Value of a Changeless Bible

A prominent characteristic of our day is change. Of course, change has occurred in every age, but who can doubt that there have been so many, tremendous, and rapid changes in recent years, far beyond what most could have imagined? Change is noticeable in almost every area of life whether you consider transportation, agriculture, medicine, methods of waging war, entertainment, or whatever. We are living in the middle of an immeasurable technological revolution of changes. They are rapid, radical, extensive, making what is new today to be obsolete tomorrow.

Many of these changes have meant genuine progress, improvements, and have certainly been beneficial to mankind. Especially is this true in the realm of health, standards of living, the ability to do things. It is a shame that more have not benefited from changes in these areas.

It is also true that sometimes people have provoked change simply for the sake of change without due regard to the detriment of mankind. There is no virtue in making changes that take us backward from what is useful and good. The "art" of tearing down without offering something better is definitely not commendable. We ought not oppose change just for the sake of retaining the status quo any more than we ought to promote change just for the sake of change. What presently exists is not always the most desirable, but we certainly ought to turn to something better before making changes. Furthermore, all changes are neither beneficial nor permissible before God.

Some Changes Are Unwelcome

There have been changes invading areas where there ought not be change. There have been many changes that are nothing less than open rebellion against God and His will. Religions are changing, but the religion of God has

not changed. Who has not taken note of the changes in the denominational world in matters of doctrine, attitude toward Christ and the Bible, moral standards, even questions about the reality of God, and challenges to the Deity of Christ such as has not been seen nor heard previously? There have been changes in the role of women, families, ethics, and matters that affect the way people live one toward another. Romanism used to boast how it has not changed, but there are few systems of religion that have undergone more changes in its history than Romanism. Especially is this true in recent decades. Religious people of all kinds have attempted to change what is proper regarding marriage and divorce. They have sought to remove the stigma of divorce. The sanctity of the home has been attacked. Premarital and extra-marital sexual relationships have become so commonplace that many think this is what ought to be. Even the dignity of human life has been viciously attacked in our own "nation under God" with over twenty million abortions over the past few years. When even the religions are founded on the ever shifting sands of human doctrines and opinions, swaying with the trends of unrighteousness, following the authorities of men, one cannot look with confidence toward religion generally for any true guidance in life, let alone guidance toward heaven.

It has been one of the most depressing facts of my lifetime as a preacher of the gospel to see many changes in the churches of Christ as more and more have opted to imitate the ways of the world rather than remain loyal to the truth of the Bible. The weak, compromising nothingness that is characteristic of so many, even and especially in the pulpits and places of leadership, has been a heart rending reality that faithful Christians cannot ignore.

Christ's Will Does Not Change

But the will of God through Jesus Christ does not and has not changed with the currents and tides of human departures from truth. The truth does not now or ever accommodate man's rebellion and sinfulness. That which man might make and discover he might improve and change. But there is no way that any man or group

of men can improve, nor has the right to change, the counsel of God.

Jude three teaches we are to contend for the faith once delivered. Psalm 19:7 teaches the law of the Lord is perfect. How can that be improved? Romans 11:34, "*For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor?*" Does any person really think he can advise God and make alterations and improvements on what He has said and done? James 1:25 tells us of the perfect law of liberty. Isaiah 55:9, "*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than you thoughts.*" Man never shows himself more foolish than to challenge the wisdom of God. First Corinthians 1:25, "*Because the foolishness of God is wiser than man; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*" Therefore, people ought not tamper with that which the Almighty has delivered. In fact, God specifically forbids him to do so. Man ought not try to change God's Word, but rather appreciate the value of the changeless Bible.

Sin is Real

The value of a changeless Bible is made evident in the prevalence of sin. There are three words used in Scripture to describe man's spiritual offense against God: (1) sin, (2) transgression, (3) iniquity. Sin means to miss the mark (Romans 3:23). Transgression is to step across the boundary (First John 3:4). Iniquity is to deviate from the standard (Isaiah 59:2). To speak of such things is to speak of a certain reality. Some will attempt to cast a cloak about sin to bring it into respectability and remove the stain and stigma of it. We hear people contend, "Sin is only as you think it is." Some call sin a mere disease, the result of some fault of society. Others define it as simply anti-social behavior. Skeptics call sin a throwback from the dark ages of religious superstition. Every kind of explanation anyone can imagine is called upon to remove man from responsibility to God. Is it not strange how evident the results of sin are everywhere? Yet, some attempt to deny its reality. Sin is as real as the day that Satan deceived Eve in the Garden of Eden, and we are wise if we believed that.

The Bible deals with the problem of sin. It is not a book devoted to science, economics, history, or other themes. But it does stress the reality of sin, wages of sin, man's individual and personal guilt of sin, God's concern for man in sin, and God's provision for the remedy for sin through Christ, as well as what man must do to be saved from the wages of sin. It also gives us direction and guidance how to avoid and prevent sin and its consequences. Nothing anywhere else confronts sin as does the message of God. Since sin has not changed in the history of man, only taking on new forms from time to time, how fortunate we are to have the Word of God that deals with sin and that it does not change!

Gives Purpose to Life

The value of the changeless Bible is also evident in that its message gives purpose and meaning to life. What is the meaning of life? Many obviously have never learned because they are uninformed about life as revealed by the Giver of life. Many cannot successfully cope with life because they have never understood where they came from, why they are here, what they are supposed to be while they are here, or where they are going. The Bible instructs us regarding all of this with clarity and confidence. People are seen and heard to turn to all sorts of weird, distorted, self-destructive behavior seeking to insert some purpose for their existence. They champion all kinds of causes, pursue all kinds of lifestyles, looking and searching, using everything from drugs to degeneracy, crime, and suicide.

The meaninglessness of life stems from the failure to understand the nature of man and his worth. So many have swallowed the false atheistic philosophies from the minds of men, subscribing only to the materialistic explanations for all things, contending man is only an evolved animal that has come into being by chance and accident. Those of this persuasion who seem to have some concern for the human family have adopted a "social gospel" approach, failing to recognize the spiritual side of man.

But man is spirit as well as flesh. There is an inward as well as outward man. Genesis 1:27 teaches we are created

in the image of God, and God is spirit (John 4:24). We have a mind, with the power to reason, understand, decide. We have a goal and purpose in life, and our noble mission is to glorify the Creator. We have the assurance of victory at the end of this life if we serve our Creator. We are not like the beasts of the field. We cannot and do not live by "*bread alone*" (Matthew 4:4). We cannot simply eat, drink, and be merry and then close our eyes in the sleep of death and consider that to the sum of our existence. If this life and the material side of it is all there is to our existence, then we are of all men most miserable. There is no reason for life. It is all a farce and a cruel hoax perpetrated on man.

The whole duty of man is to fear God and keep His commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14). There is an "oughtness" that we must appreciate and to which we must conform. The message of the Bible gives purpose for living and hope for the dying (First Corinthians 15:19, 24-26, 52-57). This is the resurrection chapter that assures us that physical death is not the end but the entrance into an eternity. It is one of the many passages of hope and purpose that does not and will not change. Thanks be to God for this changeless Word!

Dignity of Man

There is a solid Biblical emphasis on the dignity of human life and the emphasis on the concern for every individual. Even though there be billions of people on earth, there is no such thing as an unimportant person. God is not only aware and concerned for the masses, but for each one that makes up the masses. This changeless Bible reveals to us the mind of God and His interest in each one. Matthew 6:26, "*Behold, the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?*" Psalm 119:1-12 is a classic passage on the consideration by the Lord of heaven for each person. Again, Matthew 10:29-31, "*Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.*"

The very invitation of the Lord to people to enjoy the blessings He offers stresses the individual. The invitation is to *"whosoever will."* When Peter gave instructions how to be forgiven of sin, he gave the command to *"every one of you."* How glad we can be that this truth revealed in Scripture does not change with the fleeting changes of this world!

Responsibility

But we should also be sobered by the reality that the individual concern that God has for us also calls for individual responsibility toward God and that each shall stand before God in judgment (Second Corinthians 5:10). We all shall be judged. The unchangeable revelation of individual worth is both comforting and sobering. We should be impressed with the extent of personal duty and privilege.

In a world of change, let us not confuse the changing with the changeless. May we lay hold on that which serves as an anchor to the soul. Let us follow that stable standard and guide in life that is sure and steadfast. Let us follow that certain and unwavering path that eventually leads those who take it into heaven. First Peter 1:24,25, *"For all flesh is a grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth and the 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."*

* * * * *

P.S. We are living in an age (1994) when change is the word of the day both in and out of the church. We have no confidence in political leaders who call for changes because they are simply advancing their own fame and fortunes, and their words are usually meaningless. But when there are those in the church who call for a change, even changes in the message of God, we have grave concern and must resist such Satanic activity to the utmost of all of our capacity. JWB

Jesus and Bartimaeus

This is a study of the relationship between Jesus and another person whose name was Bartimaeus. There are three records of the meeting of Jesus and Bartimaeus, Matthew 20:29-34, Mark 10:46-52, and Luke 18:35-43. Because of the length of these passages they are not copied here but the reader is urged to read each of them before continuing this lesson.

These records are not exactly alike in every particular. But there are no contradictions between them. It takes all three of the records to have the full story because one account may include information that another may omit. Taken together we learn everything that God has considered important for us to know and to learn the lessons intended.

Jesus was on His way to Jerusalem when he met Bartimaeus. Calvary was but one week away, and the end of His personal ministry here on earth would soon be upon Him. By this time His fame was widespread and the people had responded to Him with varying reactions, some very positive and receptive, and others very negative and hostile.

As Jesus made His way toward the city He knew what awaited Him there. He had already informed His disciples, Mark 10:32-34, *"And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him, saying, Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles, and they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again."*

As Jesus went from place to place it was not unusual that He be followed by large throngs of people. This was because His fame and reputation for doing many miracles and good works preceded Him.

Meet Bartimaeus

On the way Jesus met the man Bartimaeus. Matthew reveals that there were two men. Mark and Luke focus attention only on the one. Bartimaeus was not a ruler, a religious leader, a king, or a rich man. He was a beggar, and blind beggar at that. Begging was about the only means of livelihood that existed for such people at that time. But Bartimaeus heard the noise of the crowd and asked what it meant. He was told that Jesus was coming. He evidently had heard much of Jesus before this time as is evidenced by the events that follow. One point we do not want to overlook is that Jesus, even though in the midst of a throng of people, was mindful of even one. He showed concern for this single individual and demonstrated interest and compassion toward him.

Being told that Jesus was coming along the way Bartimaeus began to cry out to Jesus. The way He addressed Jesus shows that He considered Jesus more than just another man, a prophet, or another miracle worker. He called Him the Son of David. Matthew says he called him, "*Lord*." The significance of this is in the fact that the prophets of old had foretold that the Messiah that God promised would be of the seed of David. Additionally, the word "*Lord*" means Master. There can be little doubt that Bartimaeus, even with the information about Jesus that he had, was already convinced that Jesus was the One God promised to send.

His Need and Faith

Bartimaeus recognized he was in need and believed that Jesus had the power to provide what he needed. He also realized that he was helpless to do for himself what was needful. Therefore, he urgently and persistently sought Jesus' help. Mark records how Jesus took note of his cry and called for Bartimaeus to be brought to Him and the meeting of the two was realized.

We, like Bartimaeus, must realize we have a spiritual need that we, by ourselves, cannot meet. We must understand, however, that Jesus has the power to provide. Like Bartimaeus, we must recognize Him to be more than just another exceptional man, not merely a great leader, teacher, and martyr for righteousness, but as His name indicates, He is the Savior, Emmanuel, God with us. We must confess as did Peter, "*Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God.*" We must be convinced as was the centurion at His cross, "*Truly, this was the Son of God.*"

We often refer to the people on Pentecost, and for good reason, because that is the day the Lord's church began. The people heard evidence concerning Christ as was preached by Peter and the other apostles. Being convinced, they cried out, "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" This reflected their attitude toward what they learned and toward Jesus. It reflected the realization they were in need of that which Jesus provided. This is the same attitude of heart that people must have today if they be benefited by the Christ.

The Lord Was Concerned

Another prime truth we grasp from this account is that even though there are over four billion people in the world, there is not one for whom the Lord does not have concern. We may be inclined to think because there are so many people that God does not care for us as individuals and that His interest is only for the masses. It is true that God is concerned for the human family generally, but He also is concerned for each of us independently and separately. Even amidst the throngs that surrounded Him, He turns to give attention to this one man. He does not exclude the individual. As in Luke fifteen, where Jesus is presented as the Good Shepherd who had one hundred sheep and ninety-nine were safe in the fold, He was concerned for the one that was lost. It is almost beyond our comprehension to understand the extent and measure of the worth of each person, and the Lord's interest in each one.

The Response

We see the blessed reaction of Bartimaeus when Jesus called for him. He immediately came because that was his great desire. How unlike others of whom we read, for instance in Luke 14:16-24, where we read the teaching of Jesus about a man who prepared a great supper and extended invitations to his potential guests. But one by one those who were invited began to make excuses and refused to come. The displeasure of the host, in this case representing the Lord, is seen in the comment, "*For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.*" (Luke 14:24). Many today, rather than desiring to come to Christ and taking advantage of the opportunity when called, will make excuses on top of excuses for refusing Him. Why cannot they realize they are sealing their own eternal doom?

Some Discouraged Him

But the study of Jesus and Bartimaeus would not be finished without noting the rebuke the people around Bartimaeus made toward him when he first began to cry out to Jesus. Why did they seek to silence the beggar? We are not specifically told. Could it be that they felt he was only a nuisance? Were they ashamed of him? Possibly they had not shown proper concern for him themselves and were embarrassed at his condition. They may have felt that such a one as he did not deserve the attention of one like Jesus. Regardless of their reasons, we see the sharp contrast between their lack of concern for him and the genuine concern Jesus had for him.

We must learn that anyone who would seek to discourage us from calling to Christ is not our friend. They do not seek our highest good. They do not have the concern for another that all should have toward everyone around them. Regardless of who it might be and for whatever reasons, anyone who would influence you and discourage you from coming to Christ is your deadly foe.

The power of Jesus was demonstrated when He said unto Bartimaeus, "*What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?*" Upon being asked to grant his sight, Jesus touched his eyes and Bartimaeus received his sight. Certainly, this was a miracle, another manifestation that Jesus was who He claimed to be. But the power of Christ and the

performance of the miracle are not the only important lessons and information that we learn from this event. This account displays certain principles of God's dealing with man that we must notice.

So Must We

Just as Bartimaeus believed the information concerning Jesus and was convinced He was the Messiah, so must we. It is evident that sufficient evidence had been brought to the mind of Bartimaeus and even though we do not know exactly what that evidence was, it was convincing to him. We also have evidence given to us that is designed to convince us of the same truth concerning Christ. John wrote, John 20:30,31, "*And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life in his name.*" Romans 10:17 teaches that faith comes by hearing the Word of God. We have that Word and the inspired record and testimony of the witnesses who were present on such occasion as this.

It is important to notice that this assertion by John followed conversation between Jesus and Thomas, the one who temporarily had doubt that Jesus had come from the tomb. He had said he would not believe until he had seen the nail scars and the wound in His side. Upon being granted opportunity to consider the evidence, he cried out, "*My Lord and my God.*" God expects us to believe in Jesus as the Christ. But God has also provided sufficient evidence for our faith.

Bartimaeus Ignored the Discouragement

Even though Bartimaeus was discouraged from crying out to Jesus, fortunately, Bartimaeus ignored the attempts to silence His quest for the attention of Jesus. Had he succumbed to their rebuke, he would never have been blessed. There may be those close to us, in our associations, who discourage us from following Christ. It may be a relative or one who claims to be a friend. There may be those who would make you feel undeserving of the Lord's blessings. To be sure, none of us deserve the

salvation He offers. But that is all the more reason we need to come to Him. This is why He came to this world. If we deserved what He offers, we would not even need Him.

Some may ridicule you if you suggest following the righteous way of life after Christ. They may point out your sins and weaknesses to convince you that you cannot overcome your transgressions. They fail to realize that where sin abounds, grace abounds much more (Romans 5:20). Some might even persecute you in one form or another and do all they are capable of doing to keep you from the Lord, even persuading you that if you try you still cannot do His will. Some will attempt to convince you that just any way you choose to go will be all right with God. But we must remember that the Lord never invited anyone to do anything they cannot do, and He has invited all men, everywhere, to come to Him and be saved from sin.

Jesus is Concerned About You

Finally, once again let us be impressed that Jesus is concerned not just with the high and mighty of this world, nor just the rich and worldly-wise, but also with the poor and lowly. One of the marks that He is the Messiah is the fact that the poor had the gospel preached to them (Luke 7:22). It is generally the case that those who consider themselves to be "somewhat" in this world are not near so receptive to God's truth as those who are of more humble and modest means (First Corinthians 1:26). This is because some rely too heavily on their wealth, and others have no wealth upon which to rely, and therefore are more willing to hear the gospel.

Even now, our Lord, through the gospel message, is saying to each one that they are welcome to come to Him. So we send forth the same report to you as was given to Bartimaeus, "*Be of good comfort, rise, He calleth for thee.*"

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The Salvation of Noah

The processes used in the printing industry have changed quite dramatically over the past few years. Even though not used now as was in previous years, there was a molding of metallic type that was inked and placed against the paper on printing presses. That metallic type was a certain letter that, when pressed on the paper, would produce its image. The image was called the imprint or the antitype, that which answered to the form of the type. Printing now involves other processes that have proven to be more efficient, expedient, and rapid. Seldom today does one find in the average print shop a letter press in wide use, but presses that use offsetting or other means of production. But our study is not about printing. We cite this to illustrate the distinction between type and antitype, that which was the original form and that which answers to it.

Type and Antitype

There are types and antitypes in the Bible. The dictionary defines an antitype as a person, thing, or idea that is represented by an earlier type or symbol, such as a New Testament event or person, prefigured in the Old Testament. Our study concerns one of the types in the Old Testament and its New Testament antitype. We study the salvation of Noah. Not only shall we be impressed with the inseparable tie between the Old and New Testaments, but shall also see illustrated for us our own salvation.

Our text is First Peter 3:20,21, *"Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. 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."*

The term “*like figure*” means an antitype. The salvation of Noah is a type of our salvation. In some sense we are to regard baptism as saving us. We do not understand that the power of salvation is the physical element of water. Nor do we understand that we are saved by works of our own merit when we are baptized. God alone has the power to save and we are saved by the blood of Christ. The water into which we are commanded to be baptized has no magical ability to wash away our sins. It is not some kind of “holy water” that has special powers any more than the waters of Jordan into which Naaman was commanded to dip seven times in order to be healed of leprosy had special powers (Second Kings 5). We understand baptism is the means used by God as a condition and act of obedience that one must obey in order for God to save. It is most significant that where and whenever baptism and salvation are mentioned in the same text, together, baptism always comes before the blessing.

Not Baptism Alone

The Bible does not teach that one is saved by baptism alone. The reason we even mention this is because some, contend that salvation is by faith alone because in some passages only faith is mentioned when discussing salvation (Romans 5:1; John 3:16). Only baptism is mentioned in the discussion of salvation in our text. It would follow that if the inclusion of faith and the omission of baptism in one passage teaches salvation by faith alone, then this passage would teach salvation by baptism alone without faith. But that is not true.

Neither is there any mention of the blood of Christ, repentance, or any other condition of salvation. The truth is that we must include all God has said on the subject in order to learn what is included. It is not necessary to mention every point in every verse whenever salvation is discussed. That would not be any more reasonable than presenting the entire multiplication table every time you multiplied.

Was Noah saved by water? The answer is yes because the text so affirms. Was he saved by water without faith? The answer is no because Hebrews 11:7, “*By faith, Noah.*”

being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house..." Never does the Bible teach we are saved by faith alone, repentance alone, baptism alone, or any other such thing alone.

Not When He Heard

When was Noah saved? The record of Noah preparing the ark is found in Genesis 6:14-22 to which we now call the attention of the reader. It records how God made a revelation to Noah of the coming destruction of the wicked world and Noah believed what God told him. Was Noah saved the moment he heard God's word? No! God told him what to do, how to do it, giving instructions concerning the ark, how to build it, from what material to build it, the window, door, dimensions, number of stories, pitching it with pitch, and all the rest. He even instructed him about the animals to be taken into the ark.

The Scripture then records, "*Thus did Noah, according to all that God commanded him, so did he.*" Did his doing what God said earn salvation for Him? No! Did he merit his salvation because he did these things? No! Was it necessary for him to do what God instructed? Yes! Without obedience he would not have been spared. He heard, believed what God said, and obeyed and was saved. We would not be reading about him if he had simply heard and believed what God said but never obeyed. He would have failed to take advantage of the gracious means of salvation that God offered Him.

Let it be stressed also that Noah was not saved the moment he believed the truth of God. Some contend we are saved the moment we believe. Noah was not, and neither are we.

Noah was saved in the ark by water. The water lifted the ark above the destruction of the flood to the saving of Noah and his family (Genesis 7:17). Peter says that baptism is the antitype of Noah's salvation in the ark by water. In "*like figure*" we are saved.

Saved From What?

From what are we saved? We are not saved from persecution (Second Timothy 3:12), nor from disease and physical and physical death (Hebrews 9:27). We are not saved from the pain and sorrow that accompanies man in this life. The early Christians endured all such things. Nor are we saved at the point of baptism into the final and eternal heaven. Peter said "*baptism doth also now save us.*" The salvation at baptism is a present salvation, not heaven. There is a salvation presently enjoyed. Eternal salvation is dependent also upon one's faithfulness (Revelation 2:10). Peter refers to the same salvation as that which he preached on Pentecost (Acts 2:38), the forgiveness of sins. This is the same salvation Jesus mentioned in Mark 16:16, and which He said would begin at Jerusalem with the "*remission of sins*" (Luke 24:46,47). He refers to salvation from old sins, past sins, from which the Christian has been purged (Second Peter 1:9), sins that are past (Romans 3:25). (The Romans passage would also include sins that were committed by those who lived faithfully under the old and former dispensation under Moses' law).

What Baptism is Not!

Peter inserts an explanation that baptism is not the putting away the filth of the flesh. It was not simply taking a bath to remove dirt from the body. Why would he even mention such a thing? The only reason he would have to mention this is because of the possibility that some would confuse the immersion in water (baptism is immersion) with simply bathing. If baptism was just dropping a few drops of water on the head it would never have been necessary for Peter to make the distinction between baptism and bathing. Peter's comment is an illusion to the act of baptism which is immersion, a burial in water.

An Answer and an Appeal

Peter further explains that baptism is an honest, sincere response of the heart to the call of God. God's call comes through the preaching of the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14). As would be anticipated, when God calls, He expects an answer. Baptism is man's answer of obedience to the call of the Lord. It is man's appeal unto

God for his salvation. He does this with honest and good conscience, a conscience properly taught and with proper and informed motives. The conscience has been subjected to teaching that has produced faith, a faith that demands the action of obedience, a faith that is perfected or made whole and complete by obedience.

Peter either told a lie or he told the truth. Baptism either saves or it does not save. Peter said baptism saves. We suggest that people pay attention to what Peter said baptism does rather than what men say it does not do. Baptism either saves or Peter was wrong. It saves us by the remission of sins. Peter does not call baptism a symbol of our salvation or a sign that we are already saved prior to being baptized. Baptism is a symbol, but of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3,4). It is a symbol of that truth that saves. By being baptized we come in contact with the saving blood of Christ which was shed in His death (Romans 6:3,4). We are baptized into His death.

The salvation of Noah was a temporal salvation that serves as a type of our spiritual salvation from sin. Noah, upon hearing God's word, believed it, and acted in obedience to what God commanded. God, by means of water, saved Noah and his household.

Hear, Believe, and Obey

Today, people hear the gospel, believe it, and when they obey the commands of it, repenting, confessing faith in Christ, and being baptized for the remission of sins in the name of (by the authority of) Jesus Christ, their sins are forgiven. God, by means of water, saves the obedient.

Again, we emphasize, because some have falsely accused us of teaching what we never have taught, the water itself, of itself, by itself, does not save. God saves by the blood of Christ. We are saved by His grace, mercy, and love. But when does God save us? It is when people have heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel commands, including baptism.

I once read an article in a paper called "The Baptist and Reflector," in which the writer was commenting on

Galatians 3:27 that reads, "*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*" He commented that this tells one way we enter into Christ. I wrote him twice and his editor once and simply asked, "Where do we read any other way of entering into Christ?" I never heard a word in spite of repeated attempts to extract a response. If any reader of this article knows of such a passage, I would appreciate you sending it to me. We all know why I never heard from them. There is no other step that takes one from out of Christ, into Christ. Romans 6:3,4 and Galatians 3:27, the only two passages that tell us how one gets into Christ, both teach the same act of obedience. It would seem that honest and sincere people who claim to love the law of the Lord would struggle to obey as much as they struggle to uphold their denominational dogmas and try to get around what the Lord has commanded. Would it not be far more simple to just obey and be blessed?

The account of the salvation of Noah was given, not just to relate the preservation of the human race at the time of God's destruction of man's wickedness. It was not written to simply talk about Noah. It is an illustration, a symbol, a type of the means God uses to save man, even us, from a worse destruction, the condemnation of the soul. The record is God's forethought of instruction to those of us yet living under Christ. Let us understand that as Noah heard, believed, and obeyed, even so must we. The question before you is, "Have you obeyed the Lord in baptism for the remission of sins?"

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JWB

Two Kinds of Hearers

"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name cast out demons, and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell: and great was the fall of it." (Matthew 7:21-27.

The Last Word

* * * * *

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

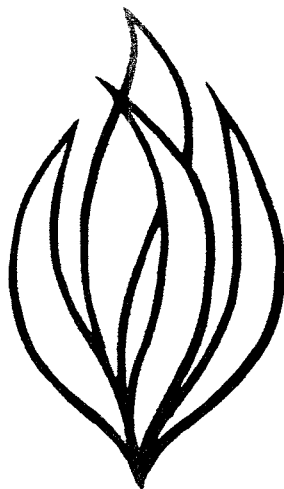
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A Burning Fire



*"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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Husband And Wife As A Team

You should read Ephesians 5:23-33 before reading this lesson. That text serves as the text for the subject. Many of us consider ourselves most blessed to have been privileged to have the husband/wife team demonstrated before us by our parents. Many of us enjoy this teamship in our own marriages. For this we are grateful beyond expression. It seems that everybody ought to know that the husband and wife are to function as a team.

But it is also obvious, due to the havoc and breakdown found in many marriages, that a lot of people have not learned this fundamental truth. If more were aware of it, and worked accordingly, there would not be the destruction of homes so rampant in our society today.

We are discussing an attitude, a matter of the heart. We are also focusing attention on a relationship. We can say that we are studying an attitude of heart that should be demonstrated in a specific relationship.

What is a team? The word is not used in the Bible with reference to marriage even though the concept is there, as we shall discover. A team consists of people working together, yoked together, coupled, linked, cooperating for the common good. Webster defines the word and uses marriage to illustrate the meaning.

Different Yokes

The word "yoke" can be understood in terms of a burden or an unbearable load as Paul used it in Second Corinthians 6:14, "*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.*" Or it can be understood to refer to a beautiful and intimate relationship of favor as Jesus used it in His invitation found in Matthew 11:28-20. "*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."

Being yoked in marriage requires agreement. Amos stated the great principle in Amos 3:3, *"Can two walk together except they be agreed?"* Teamwork demands consideration, communication, consultation, cooperation, companionship, and in marriage there must be the inclusion of Christ. Without these essentials the team simply cannot and will not function as its Originator intended.

Originally

It was God's original and present purpose that the husband and wife function as a team, not separately, but as a complement to each other. Genesis 2:18, *"And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him."* God did not say that it is wrong to be unmarried. But as it is stated in Proverbs 18:22, *"Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favor of the Lord."* Marriage is a blessing given to mankind by God. If we could summarize marriage with one word, we would choose the word "companionship." This is what God intends in marriage.

Several Biblical Phrases Show Teamship

Let us now read Genesis 2:20-25 where there are several phrases that show the teamwork we are considering. *"And Adam gave names to all cattle, and the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found a help meet for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed."*

This teaching concerning marriage was repeated by Jesus Christ when He gave His will concerning marriage (Matthew 19:1-9). His will is as God planned and designed it from the beginning. All men everywhere are accountable to God through the teaching of Christ in this matter as in all others (John 12:48).

Composition of the Team

Notice the team is composed of a husband and wife, not merely a man and a woman, nor a man and women, nor a woman and men, nor a man and man, nor woman and woman. Many have perverted this relationship, such as homosexuals, lesbians, adulterers, fornicators, etc. Of such Paul said that God had given them up to dishonor, vile affections, and called them reprobate (Romans 1:24, 26,28). While we have pity and concern for those who pervert themselves in any fashion, nobody can claim to be loyal to the doctrine of Christ and pronounce such things as anything other than sin which damns the soul.

Teamwork of husband and wife is seen in the phrase "*bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.*" Understand the context. All the other creatures God had created had passed before Adam and none of them were suitable to be his companion. Nor was it expected that they would be. So God made a special creation for man that was suitable. The phrase, "*this is now,*" literally means, "this turn." The other creatures had their turn, so to speak, and were found unsuitable. Now it was the woman's turn, the special creation, and she was created suitable as man's companion.

Teamship is seen in the phrase "*one flesh.*" There is a difference in flesh. All flesh is not the same flesh because there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds (First Corinthians 15:39). We might add here that this passage, alongside many others, drives a spike through the heart of any attempt to harmonize the Bible with organic evolution, atheistic, theistic, agnostic, or whatever. But the point as it relates to our theme is that God made man and woman of the same kind. They were two distinct personalities blended into one satisfying unit for the physical and part of the spiritual needs of both.

It is as stated in Proverbs thirty-one, "*He trusts her... He praises her... She will do him good.*" (Verses 11,12,28).

The word "man" is sometimes used in the Bible to refer to the male of the human family. Sometimes it refers to the whole human family, male and female. The man is the male man, and the woman is the female man. They were not Deity, nor animals, but humanity, of the same kind and of one flesh.

The Closest Relationship

This teamship is closer than the tie between parent and child. They were to leave and cleave one to the other. Prime allegiance belongs to each other above even the close tie of parent and child. If parents want to give a great gift to their children that will be of enduring strength for them throughout the life of the child, give them parents who truly love each other before all else this world offers. We are to love our mates first before everything except God. The beautiful truth is that when we love God first we will love our mate above everything else.

Husbands and wives are interdependent on each other. "*For the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man. Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of man, even so is man also by the woman; but all things of God.*" (First Corinthians 11:8,9,11,12).

Anti-Marriage

We hear much criticism today against the very institution of marriage. Some complain that in marriage you lose your individuality. We can never completely lose our individuality. We shall stand as individuals before God in the judgment (Second Corinthians 5:10). But in any human relationship, including marriage, there is the sacrifice of some individuality. Why just attack marriage and not all other human associations? This is because many want

the physical privileges in marriage without the duties in marriage.

In marriage each is an individual with distinctive roles for which each is especially made to fulfill. We should assist each other in fulfilling these God-given roles in life. Neither is the master of himself or herself, but each seeks the highest good of the unit. This is what "agape" or love embodies and involves.

What It Requires

Teamwork in marriage requires compatibility, companionship, nearness, personal involvement, cooperation, but also Christ. We need to understand that any disposition of marriage that omits God cannot be what marriage is intended to be. There are three involved in marriage, not just a man and a woman. There must be the inclusion of the Designer, Originator, Giver of marriage, who is God. Many problems arise because people fail to understand and accept this. Many problems could be solved, even avoided, if all would respect this fact of truth. False doctrines arise because some have failed to respect both the individual and collective duties each has toward God. Marriage is not merely a social relationship, economic arrangement, or just a legal contract. It is a holy, sacred, God-given relationship. Without God in marriage it is lacking in a basic fundamental ingredient.

This attitude of teamwork must manifest itself in a number of areas. Husbands and wives are like a lock and key, or two blades of scissors. They cannot and do not function properly by themselves.

There is teamwork in the conjugal or sexual relationship. Paul wrote, "*Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.*" (First Corinthians 7:2). This "added language" of love, the expression of love, the satisfaction of pure and holy emotions and desires within marriage is reserved for the members of the team. Outside of marriage it is an abominable transgression against God, society, one's mate, self, and family.

There should be teamwork in the rearing of children. Genesis 1:28 tells us that God blessed THEM and said to THEM to be fruitful and replenish the earth. Both have a duty, not only in bringing the child into the world, but also in the upbringing, training, and care of the child. This includes setting goals, priorities, discipline, provision. The child is not "my child" or "your child", but "our child."

There should be oneness in handling the finances of the home. This is a source of problems among many. Some talk about "her money and his money." This is foolish. You may not agree, but you need to consider this point more seriously. Money problems have caused much strife in marriages. An understanding that in marriage it is no longer "me, my, mine," nor "you and yours", but it becomes "we, us, ours" in everything.

Teamwork demands loyalty to one another. This would eliminate many problems. Nobody from outside the marriage can intrude into a marriage where husband and wife are loyal to each other. This includes having and showing respect for each other's feelings, refusing to embarrass and destroy the other.

For Life

Teamwork in marriage means you are together for life, in good times, bad times, sharing joys, sorrows, loads, burdens, in sickness or health, adversity or prosperity, not pulling apart, not pulling against, but pulling with each other. It is a case of "me and you against the world."

The words of Ruth state the idea. *"The Lord do so to me and more also if ought but death part thee and me."* As Jesus said, *"What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."*

A Basic Point

Teamwork in marriage means being united in THE FAITH. It is not enough to be united in a faith, but THE FAITH. Both ought to be Christians as the Bible teaches. Unless both are in Christ there is no standard by which

to measure, no rule for making decisions, no guide for life, no basis for solutions to differences. Let us teach our young to marry "*in the Lord*." So many who have ignored this teaching have lived to regret it and more are lost to the cause of Christ than remain faithful in a religiously divided home. The best team is one composed of a Christian husband and a Christian wife. It is difficult enough at times to resist the devil when you are standing together. How much more difficult when you are divided in the most important matter of life, your relationship to God. Like machinery, it is not the revolutions that wear out the machine, it is the friction. When both are Christians you have the oil that will keep down friction.

We need to teach our young, as many of us have been taught, that the primary goal in marriage is to help each other get to heaven. This is a statement of Peter, "*...dwell with them... as heirs together of the grace of life*." (First Peter 3:7). Recognize that you both are precious souls, precious to each other, and precious to God.

The Leader

Every team must have a leader. In God's plan the husband is the leader of the home. We are sorry this does not please everyone. But it pleases all who love God (Ephesians 5:23).

There are alternatives to teamwork. What are these alternatives? They are frustration, estrangement, heartbreak, betrayal, harsh words, bitterness, regret, agony, broken homes, scarred children, ruined lives, separations, loneliness, hatred, handicapped youth, lost souls. Unless the God-designed team functions as God has designed it, Satan will run in some substitutes that will destroy everyone involved.

Value of Experience

While watching a sporting event and playoff games, I heard one commentator say, "Have you noticed how that most of the time the teams with experience are the ones that make the playoffs." He was simply observing how experience makes the team more effective. This is true in

sports. It is also true in marriage. You learn to think alike, work smoothly, understand each other, grow together, where one stands two stand, and you never walk alone.

We speak of newlyweds and how they seem so well suited for each other. Bless their hearts, they may well be. But they are not near as well suited as they shall become as they go through life together.

God's team consists of a husband and wife, living together, loving God and each other, in the oneness of marriage, and in Christ.

* * * * *

Set Thine House In Order

Second Kings 20:1-6, "In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, set thine house in order; for thou shalt die and not live. Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the Lord saying, I beseech thee, O Lord, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore. And it came to pass, before Isaiah was gone out of the middle court, that the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hezekiah, the captain of my people. Thus saith the Lord, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer; I have seen thy tears; behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go unto the house of the Lord. And I will add unto thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria; and I will defend this city for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake."

There are statements in this record that should motivate us to the noblest goals. Hezekiah was a good king of Judah, and there was a scarcity of good kings. Of all the kings of Northern Israel not one was called good. Of the

twenty kings of Judah only six could properly be called good. Hezekiah was one of the six.

At this time Northern Israel had already been overrun relatively recently by the Assyrian, and Jerusalem and Judah were being threatened also. In addition to this grave concern, Hezekiah was sick and it seemed he would soon die because of his illness.

That Dreaded Word

What is that word that is so seldom associated with self but so often associated with others? What is that event that reduces all men to the same rank? What is sure and certain in the future of each of us? It is death. Hebrews 9:27, "*And it is appointed unto man once to die...*" This should not be considered morbid, but realistic. This reality should, and usually does, sober our thinking. Daniel Webster, being impressed in a sermon that all must die, said, "Frigid and weak as these words might seem, at once they were to me the most impressive and awakening I ever heard." When we read of some condemned prisoner who awaits death because of his crime, to see soldiers marching into battle, knowing that many shall never return, to visit the terminally ill, to observe the inevitable toll of age, we are conscious of the solemnity that hovers about us, deeply moved by the certainty of death and the uncertainty of the continuation of life.

Hezekiah was given a temporary reprieve, a postponement, to this inevitable event. He was given additional opportunity to "*set (his) house in order.*" None of us can ever know when a day may be our last. This is all the more reason we should be busy at the task of setting, and keeping, our houses in order. We know not what a day might bring. We sing the song that says, "Get ready for the judgment day."

Houses That Were Not In Order

The Bible tells us of those who died the wrong way, that is, with their houses not in order. Jehoram, one of the wicked kings of Judah, a son of a good king named Jehoshaphat, had every advantage. The prophet Elijah

was one of his advisors and teachers. Yet, "*He departed without being desired.*" Adam Clarke said he was hated while he lived, neglected when he died, visibly cursed of God and necessarily execrated (loathed, JWB) by the people he had corrupted and oppressed. His death was a sad ending to a sorry life. His house was not in order.

Another good king's son, Absalom, died an inglorious death, exhibiting arrogance, pride, deceit, lies, greed, and leaving behind a memory of a wasted life of wrong deeds and dissipated opportunities. He died guilty of betrayal and disloyalty to his father. He is another example of a man who died without his house in order.

In the New Testament, Luke twelve, we read of the only man that Jesus ever specifically called a fool. The reading of verses sixteen through twenty-one reveals how tragic it is to face God in judgment having left this life in such a fashion as did that man. Thinking that he had an abundance of this world's wealth, he failed to establish the correct priorities in life and in death all of the material abundance he had at his disposal was of no value to him. He did not set his house in order.

Time and space forbids that we speak of so many others of similar and pitiable destiny, such as Cain, Lot's wife, King Saul, Judas, etc. But they allowed death to overtake them and their houses were out of the order that God expected and instructed for each of them, and us.

A Step Toward the Crown

In sharp contrast to these we read of those whose death was but the final step in a great accomplishment by the grace of God. But they had set their houses in order. Their lives were successes and death was but a crowning of that success.

King Josiah of Judah, another of the few good kings, met death defending the territorial integrity of his nation, executing his duty as the king of God's people. He had been the initiator of many reforms during his reign and tried to get the people to return to God before the overthrow of Judah became a reality. Second Chronicles 35:24 says of his death, "*And all Judah and Jerusalem*

mourned for Jostah." When good men die those who appreciate what is good will mourn because of their absence from our midst.

Consider the death of Stephen recorded in Acts seven. His death is the first recorded death of one martyred for the cause of Christ. He had stood before the enemies of Christ and boldly proclaimed Him. In his message he showed them the Christ and reproved them for their unbelief. Acts 7:54-60 tells us of the vicious reaction on the part of his hearers. They, being cut to the heart, gnashed on him, with their teeth, cast him out of the city, and stoned him until death brought him relief from this wicked world and wicked people. While we would not cherish the manner in which this nobleman of God died, how sweet would be the fate of us all if we would leave this life as prepared to meet God as did Stephen. He had his house in order.

Acts 9:36-39, *"Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is by interpretation called Dorcas; this woman was full of good works, and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days that she was sick, and died; whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he should not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. 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."* Notice the text speaks of those things which Dorcas did *"while she was with them."* In death she was no longer with them, and because of this they were grieved. She had been a person full of good works, charitable deeds, using the talents that she had for the relief and benefit of others. She had lived in such a fashion that her house was in order when the day of her death came.

Precious to God

As with those whose death marked the end of the tragedy of their lives, there were many others whose death was surely precious in the sight of the Lord, such as Peter,

Paul, David, Abraham, Moses, and scores of others. "*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.*" (Psalm 116:15). This is because their houses were in order when time came to die.

The following story conveys the message and the benefit of having your house in order. "I stood one day in the sanctifying memory by the side of the sainted dead. Suddenly I was conscious of the presence of a stranger nearby. He seemed to be waiting for me to speak. I said unto him, 'Friend, who art thou? And why dost thou intrude upon my moment of memories and reflections?' He answered, 'Do you not know me? I am the king of terror.' Looking at him more closely, I saw nothing about him at that moment that struck terror in my heart. 'I see nothing terrible about thee,' I responded. Then he said, 'No, for the moment I have no terrors at my command. When people live and die as did this one, my authority has vanished. But where one lives in selfishness, impurity, hatred, strife, greed, against Christ and for this present world, where one has lived without God and without hope, there I raise my throne and dress it with such terrors that are at my command. But here, in the presence of the sainted dead, I have no power. I leave thee in peace.'"

John wrote, Revelation 14:13, "*Write, 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.*" Is this not the scene of spiritual victory? Will such be the case with me and you? When shall that moment come?

It Must Come

Eventually the summons to leave this life will come to each one. We may have more immediate warnings of it. We may not. But glory can be ours if we be so wise as to not only set out houses in order, but having once done that, keep them in order. We do this by coming to Christ for forgiveness of sins, obeying His teaching to believe on Him, repent of sins, confess our faith in Him, and being baptized into Him for the remission of sins. Then we keep our houses in order as we live faithfully as a Christian should, following His footsteps day by day.

What of your house? We trust that these words do not create an undue anxiety within your heart. But we do hope they will provoke a sincere response to the Lord. If such a lesson can do this within any heart and life, the story of Hezekiah will forever be a blessing. Should you be so informed of your death being nigh upon you, what would you do? Have you set your house in order? Are you ready to be judged by the ALMIGHTY GOD of heaven? Possibly there are many physical and earthly matters that might command your attention for a while. This is understandable. But what of your spiritual orderliness? This is that which is most important, isn't it?

* * * * *

Graveclothes

John 11: 38-46, "Jesus therefore again groaning in himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus said unto them, Loose him, and let him go. Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him. But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees and told them what things Jesus had done."

The raising of Lazarus from the dead was a miracle. He had been dead for four days when Jesus called him from the tomb. This miracle was another proof of the identity of Jesus as God's Son and it caused many to believe on

Him. It also demonstrated that our Lord has power over death. He is the giver of life. He was capable of benevolent deeds of compassion toward mankind.

No Longer Appropriate

Lazarus came forth and was bound with the graveclothes appropriate for burial. But upon arising they were not appropriate for the living, and the Lord instructed that they be removed. Notice that Jesus did not remove the stone from the cave, nor the graveclothes from Lazarus. This He left for others to do. He did what they could not but expected them to do what they already had the capacity for doing. God does for people what they cannot do. But He does expect people to cooperate with what Him by doing what they can do. They removed the stone and they assisted in removing the inappropriate garments from Lazarus.

This principle is true respecting the spiritual realm. The saved are spiritually alive, even thou they² were spiritually dead. Ephesians 2:1, "*And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.*" There are some things that are characteristic of the spiritually dead. First Corinthians 6:9-11, "*Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*" It is inappropriate for the spiritually living to be clothed with the graveclothes of the spiritually dead. First Peter 5:5 teaches us to "*be clothed*" with the traits of the righteous. The redeemed are arrayed in robes of white. Revelation 7:13,14, "*And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir thou knowest. And he said unto me, These are they which came out of tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*"

The Old Testament priests had holy garments to wear. In the New Testament every Christian is a priest. He should not be clothed with the garments of sin but loosed from that which is characteristic of the spiritually dead.

There Are Many Graveclothes

People sometimes wear their graveclothes. There are a number of them. We wear the gravecloth of Biblical ignorance which handicaps and hinders us from being what we ought to be. Second Timothy 2:15 urges study that we might handle aright the word of truth. This lack of knowledge is one of the most serious problems even in the Lord's church today. We cannot mature without knowledge. First Peter 2:2, *"As new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby."* Second Peter 3:18, *"But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."*

We can resist temptation with knowledge. Jesus used the Scriptures to defeat the temptations of Satan (Matthew 4). Psalm 119:11, *"Thy word have I laid in mine heart that I might not sin against thee."* We cannot teach what we do not know. First Timothy 4:13,16, *"Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine... Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; continue in them; for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee."* We cannot be easily led astray with Biblical knowledge (Ephesians 4:11-15). Biblical ignorance cultivates the ground for apostasy.

Malice and Anger

There are also the graveclothes of character weaknesses such as malice and anger. Ephesians 4:26, *"Be ye angry and sin not; let not the sun go down upon your wrath."* First Peter 2:1, *"Wherefore laying aside all malice and all guile..."*

Selfishness

Selfishness is a gravecloth, such as was the character trait of the rich fool of Luke 12:17-19 who was only concerned about himself, centered his attention on himself, even to the neglect of others. Closely akin is

greediness and covetousness. Ephesians 5:3, *"But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you as becometh saints."* First Timothy 6:9,10 warns of materialistic attitudes and ambitions. *"But they that will be rich fall into temptations and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."*

Other Graveclothes

Other evil character traits would include dishonesty, lying, pride, egotism, jealousy, and envy. Romans 12:17, *"Provide things honest on the sight of all men."* Colossians 3:9, *"Lie not one to another, seeing you have put off the old man with his deeds."* Romans 12:3, *"For I say through the grace that is given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."* Titus 3:3, *"For we ourselves were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another."* Romans 1:29, *"Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity, whisperers..."* These are Biblical teachings regarding the spiritual graveclothes of character weaknesses which bind us so often.

Bad Habits

Then there are the graveclothes of bad habits. There is the bad habit of profanity, evil speech, gossip. Ephesians 4:29, *"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."* Matthew 12:36,37, *"But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned."*

Drinking alcohol, smoking, gambling, and other similar habits can become weight about the soul that will

destroy. Such activities ought not be a part of the lives of those who have laid hold on spiritual life. These are the kind of things that are what can be expected of those who are spiritually dead, not those spiritually alive.

Human Traditions

But people can also be bound by the graveclothes of human traditions. This was certainly a religious problem in Jesus' day. Many were convinced to be observant of the human traditions, such as were demanded by Pharisees, even above the law of God. There have always been those who assume to make laws where God has not made them just as there are those who choose to ignore what God has said, doing what God has not authorized. Men have no right to legislate for God any more than man has the right to set aside what God has legislated. What so many today have adopted as their rule is that we can do just about anything that feels acceptable to us, not realizing the necessity for authority. But religious ideas that are formed, molded, sustained and perpetuated on no higher authority than the fact that such has been done for a long time is to bind ourselves where we ought to be loosed.

Thinking You Are Unworthy

Many are bound with the gravecloth of unworthiness. It is true that we are undeserving of the blessings of God, but at the same time we are not to destroy a sense of self-worth, self-esteem, self-awareness and personal value. Each one is worth more than the whole world (Matthew 16:26). *"For what is a man profited if he gain the whole world and lost his own soul."* This is true because we are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27).

Matthew 22:39, *"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,"* implies there must be a certain degree of concern for self. Love of self is a prerequisite to properly loving another. Ephesians 5:28,29, *"So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church."* Self-esteem is vital to a husband treating his wife with respect and honor. A person that is always "down on

himself" is like a handcuffed, tied, restricted person who is unable to function, who has lost motivation for growth and improvement. This gravecloth should be loosed.

Not For The Living

There are other graveclothes that we might mention. But graveclothes are expected only when burial is necessary. They are appropriate for the dead, but not expected among the living. Such spiritual graveclothes ought not be a part of the existence of the spiritually alive. To persist in such things is to bind, limit, and restrict ourselves from operating as a Christian must operate. We must be loosed as surely as Lazarus had to be loosed. This requires a recognition that such things do not belong as a part of the Christian way of life. Once recognizing this, we must turn our attention to developing another kind of character and lifestyle. We are to put on the new man, be renewed, put off the old man, following after the image of the One who created us (Ephesians 4:17-24; Colossians 3:5-11).

* * * * *

The Rending of The Veil

Matthew 27:45-54, "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto 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? Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias. And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him. Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the

bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many. Now when the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God."

There are several miracles surrounding the death of Christ, the most prominent being the resurrection itself by which He was declared to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4). There was the darkness from the sixth hour to the ninth, which corresponds to our noon to three in the afternoon. There was an earthquake with rocks broken apart. Also mentioned are graves being opened, the bodies of saints arising and going into the city and appearing to many. The veil of the temple was rent in twain. Even if some of these events might be explained naturally, (and we are not suggesting that any of them were natural, but strongly believe each was miraculous), the fact that it all took place around the death of Christ was not just coincidental. But much of this miraculous action is overshadowed by His resurrection.

Mt. Everest is the tallest mountain in the world. But there are other peaks near Mt. Everest that are higher than any other mountain in the world except Mt. Everest. Yet, few of us ever recall the name of those peaks because of their proximity to the tallest. This may explain why the miracles surrounding the death of Christ do not receive much attention from many Bible students. The resurrection looms so large that these other things are overlooked.

Let us focus attention on two of these miraculous events, and then concentrate our study on a third.

Darkness

Consider the darkness at an hour when usually the sun is the brightest. Amos 8:9 may have been a prophetic reference to this event. *"And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord God, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear*

day." (Amos 8:9). I know of no other event that would fulfill this prophecy except the time of the death of Christ except possibly a reference to the smoke ascending over Jerusalem when it was destroyed. Peter said all the prophets had foretold of this hour and the things that transpired. (Acts 3:24).

If the words of Amos were not a prophecy of this hour, it still helps us to understand the significance of the darkness. The sun being darkened is a symbolic figure of speech recognizing the fall of a great power. With the death of Christ the dominion of Satan suffered a fatal blow. Likewise, the Jewish law and the Mosaic system came to its termination, being nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14). Whatever might be the true significance of this darkness, we cannot doubt that it was a manifestation of God's power overruling the affairs of that day. The death of the Son of God was in many respects a dark day on this earth.

Opened Graves

What about the graves being opened, the dead being raised, walking about? What happened to them? Why was this done? Only Matthew records this event so we have little information concerning it. The fact that only Matthew records it does not lessen the reality of it or its significance. It is thought that these things may have occurred, as Scripture states, "*after the resurrection,*" rather than at the moment of His death. We really do not know much about it and had rather leave off the speculation about it. Possibly the event was to emphasize the reality of a bodily resurrection. Whatever was the purpose, it was a manifestation of divine power to be sure. We read in Deuteronomy 29:29, "*The secret things belong unto God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever...*" So we are content to let the unrevealed remain so.

The Veil

Let us turn attention to the rending of the veil. The veil separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle, and later the temple. It is described in Exodus 26:31-33. There it is stated that "*the veil shall*

divide unto you between the holy place and the most holy place." It was made according to divine instruction and specifications. The priests officiated in the Holy Place. Only the high priest went into the Most Holy Place where was located the ark of the covenant, the cherubims, and the mercy seat atop the ark, which denoted the special presence of God. The temple was the center of the Jewish system, and the Most Holy Place was the centermost and primary place in the temple. Entrance into this Most Holy Place was only through the veil.

As long as the veil was intact, it preserved the sanctity of this place as well as the entire system of which it was the heart. The veil enforced the law, the priesthood system, the Jewish religion. It was a very significant element of Judaism.

But at the death of Christ this veil was rent from top to bottom. That which was formerly sanctified was no longer so. The system which it denoted lost its significance and distinction. The law, which had been a wall of partition between Jew and Gentile, was broken down at the death of Christ (Ephesians 2:15,16), and the veil that preserved that law was no longer intact.

Not only the high priest, but all the priests had entrance into the presence of God. The Jewish office of high priest ended because Jesus Christ has become our High Priest (Hebrews 4:14). We approach God through Him (John 14:6). We are all priests (First Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:6). No longer is any geographical place, any building, THE place to worship God. It is as Jesus had said, John 4:21, *"Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father."* There is no "sanctified" place.

The End of the Law

The rending of the veil was a physical manifestation of the conclusion of the Mosaic law and the accomplishment of the purpose for which it was given (Galatians 3:24). The old covenant was to be replaced with the new, better, and second will by which we are saved (Hebrews 8:6; 10:9,10). It marked the end of that

which was but a figure of that which was to come (Hebrews 9:24). The rending of the veil marked the bringing in of the "true."

Hebrews 10:20 teaches that the veil is also a representation of the body of Christ. *"By a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh."* The veil was a type of the body of Christ in that, as the veil was torn, so was the body of the Lord.

John 19:31-34, *"The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day (for that sabbath day was a high day), besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs, but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water."*

The fact that the bones of Christ were not broken was in fulfillment of prophetic words in Psalm 34:20, *"He keepeth all his bones; not one of them is broken."* The law of Moses (Deuteronomy 21:22,23) required that no body be left hanging.

Through the Veil

Just as the way into the presence of God was through the veil in the tabernacle and temple, so our way to God is through Christ. *"And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies of your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight."* (Colossians 1:21,22). As His body was torn, so was the veil.

The significance of the rending of the veil might escape us as we behold the glory of the resurrected Christ and the tremendous sacrifice on the cross that preceded it. But this tearing was a momentous demonstration of God regarding the law of Moses, the fulfillment of prophecy, the removal of the former covenant, and a graphic

presentation that we all are now subject to the authority of Jesus Christ.

Authority in religion is a hotly contested matter. But among the other lessons we learn, such as the end of the Mosaic system, and that the way to God is through Christ, we have the answer as to whom we must turn and allow to be the Guide and Master of all things.

* * * * *

TWO BIG BUMPS IN THE ROAD

The road of life has stretches of smooth pavement, but now and again, you hit a bump.

When you consider life you will soon see that there are so many wonderful blessings that God has given us. We would not for a moment suggest we emphasize the negative side of life as we look at bumps in our path. Considering family, friends, brethren, salvation, fellowship with Deity, material provisions, health, on and on, most of us can count our many blessings.

We must always be careful lest we become like the Israelites that were constantly complaining and murmuring about first one thing then another. That is not what we are doing here as we take note of two bumps on the road of life that have given us, and we think others, many hours of concern and grief. They have caused frustration and I am unable to find solutions.

There are brethren we have known through the years who once stood so loyal to God's truth, believed in the same things we do, stood with us in fighting the good fight, but where are they now? We see them in the camp of the

liberals who are destroying the church with a fury. These once good brethren promote the cause of liberalism, attend liberal functions, invite liberals for their meetings, generally show their contempt for where they once stood and those who still stand in the "old paths" of Scripture. These apostates really bring a great deal of sorrow to the heart of anybody who loves truth and the souls of men. I can list a fairly long list of such people I have known, but now, they consider me a radical because I have not accepted their digression.

The other frustrating problem is when brethren who stand for the same things, teach the same doctrine of truth, oppose the same liberal errors, but have a falling out with each other. Bad as that is, it does not stop there. They expect others to "line up" with them in their squabbles. And if you do not choose sides, you are no longer worthy of their friendship either, at least they hold you at a distance. Sometimes brethren fall out over matters about which those not involved could never in a thousand years know with certainty all the sources of their problems. But still some demand you support them or else. If you do not, you can be sure they will let you know in one way or another that they are down on you. If you try to get them together, you often get both sides against you. This is not uncommon. But it does cause the heart to suffer.

In either case, such things ought not ever be. I am not just wanting their acceptance. I can live without that, even though I once enjoyed it. But such things hurt the cause of Christ and will destroy souls in hell. That bothers me. JWB

Nothing Doubting

Acts 11:12, "*And the Spirit bade me to with them, nothing doubting.*" Peter was reporting to brethren his visit to the household of Cornelius during which he took the gospel of Christ for the first time to Gentiles. He restated before them what he had been instructed (Acts 10:20) regarding the messengers Cornelius had sent to Peter and the invitation to come to Caesarea. This was no small matter for Peter to obey. Until this time, even though he had preached the gospel is for all, he did not fully comprehend how universal the gospel message really was. For him to go visit these Gentiles was something quite new for him. But he went, "*nothing doubting.*" Is not this the way we are to follow the instructions of God in our own lives? Even though we may not grasp the importance and significance of everything God expects of us, are we not to show our faith by our unreserved obedience? We appreciate Peter's attitude toward the will of God. May we do as he did! 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.

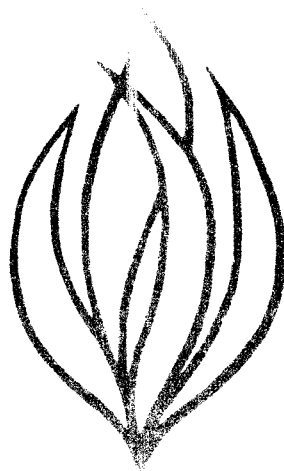
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A Burning Fire



*"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 Solution to Our Ills

Hebrews 4:12-14, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession."

This is a marvelous statement about the Word of God and of Christ. These are troublesome times for our nation. I suppose that such could be said to some extent in every generation and in every nation because trouble seems to be the companion of the human family wherever it is found (Job 14:1,2). But it is certainly true of our time. There is sin in high places and low. We suffer from the problems imposed by alcoholic beverages, low morals, disintegration of the family, illegitimate births, abortions, divorce, ever increasing crime rates, pornography, evolution (that teaches us we are only materialistic animals), and many other plagues. While many in the nation profess to be religious, how many are righteous or even see the need of being so? The nation's very fibre that holds us together as a free people is under vicious attack from both within and without, even in places of governmental power. The devil is enjoying prosperity in the "land of the free and home of the brave," now with some justification called the "land of the freaks, and home of the knaves." Possibly such can be said of every nation, and possibly of every previous generation. But what happens elsewhere and in other times is not so much our concern as what happens where we are and when we live.

Proverbs 14:34 is still true. *"Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach of any people."* Psalm 9:17, *"The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations*

that forget God." Galatians 6:7,8, "Be not deceived. God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

Trying Times for the People of God

These conditions mean that these are trying times for God's people, those who compose the Lord's church. So many things in religion generally are alarming. There are divisions, contradictions, compromises, open rebellion, and surrender to the ways of the devil within the ranks of those who profess to be religious. Many religious leaders are nothing more than charlatans, money grabbers, hypocrites that prey upon the ignorant and superstitious within the blind masses. Much of religion is sensationalism, emotionalism, "feel-goodism," propagated by false doctrines, offering false hopes, false security, even materialistic appeals. Even in the Lord's church there exists a strong and determined element that wishes to change the church and make it like the denomi(nations) round about rather than the church of which you read in the Scriptures. The partaking of the sins of the world by those who are members of the church is so commonplace that anyone who stands up and speaks out for the truth on these matters is usually branded as some kind of unloving radical. The liberal, digressive, permissive compromises alongside the lethargy, indifference, Biblical ignorance, unfaithfulness, and rebellion under the inexcusable weakness of leaders and teachers is taking a deadly toll among those who say they follow the Bible.

The church as revealed in the Bible is generally unnoticed in the world. This is not a "put down" of the church. It is simply a statement of historical reality. It reflects the degree of contempt and disdain that the world holds toward the Lord's church. Because of this some clamor for changing the church to be more acceptable and popular with the world. But it remains true that most historians write about the church only in terms of denominationalism, evidently revealing their ignorance of the church of the Bible. The church of the Bible, if mentioned at all, demands nothing more than a

passing footnote or a sub-topic. Because men love darkness rather than light, the church of the Bible is often not a very powerful force in our world and is only a slight power in molding national morality. A sad commentary is that too many in the church have mimicked the world and fashionable religion rather than imitating faithfully the Scriptural doctrine. Churches of Christ have in many instances lost the distinctiveness that ought to characterize it because of the adoption of the promotional gimmicks and gadgets, with emphasis on men, human methods, and expansive machinations rather than the inspired message. As one has commented, when one looks like a duck, waddles like a duck, quacks like a duck, has a bill like a duck, it is not surprising that he is taken for just another duck. Such has become a millstone around the neck of the Lord's church over the past few decades of liberal digression.

God Offers the Solution

God places emphasis on the message to cure the ills of mankind. It is the blood and heartbeat of the prosperity of the church. The Word is living, active, sharp, powerful, and never out-dated nor irrelevant as some would have people to believe. The problem with man and the Bible is that the Bible is untaught, unknown, misrepresented, disbelieved, untried, and unwanted. But all of this, as tragic as it is, in no way discounts the fact that the Word of God is the way of salvation and provides the solution for mankind and his problems.

Paul tells us that the world considers the gospel foolishness, but it is still the message of God to man to solve what ails him. Too often the preaching heard is nothing but pretty platitudes, designed to please the hearer, more akin to a humorous after dinner speech, intended to entertain, fill the time, go through the motions, provide a pep talk, with guarded manipulations of people, running over with super promotions and emotions, telling people what they want to hear rather than what God says they need to hear. How many who call themselves preachers are really just psychology counsellors whose counsel is what they learned in some seminary or school, often stained with humanism and

modernism, rather than the Word of God? Much that people hear is long on the personality of the preacher and his ego and short of the message of God. *"By their fruit ye shall know them."* We see the fruit being produced.

The Gospel

The solution to man's ills and the growth of the church is the gospel preached, heard, believed, obeyed, and lived. The church is composed of the saved. The gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16). The basic problem of man is sin. Just consider what you hear and see on the "news" night after night. There is war, theft, abortion, AIDS, poverty, murder, problem after problem. More often than not, at the root of it is transgression of God's moral teaching. But so few want anything said or done that would really correct or even improve the low morals and degenerate conduct of the populace.

What does the church do in these trying times? As often as not many have tried to find a way for God to accept all of this regardless of His stated hatred of every false way. The church has developed a "clergy class" of professionals, a staff, giving titles and positions just like the decayed and decaying denominations, satisfying the ego of first this one and that one, making each to appear to be "somewhat."

Many look upon preachers a simply "hired help," being paid as much for what they will not say as for what they say. They ought to be as the prophets of God proclaiming His message without fear or favor to anyone and everyone, anywhere and everywhere.

We see people taking off into the field of "church growth," as if they have discovered some special secret that nobody has ever known until they came along. THERE IS NO SECRET AS TO WHAT MAKES THE LORD'S CHURCH GROW. IT IS THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL TO THOSE WHO HEARTS ARE HONEST AND OPEN TO THE TRUTH. What do you say when someone asks you, "How can we make the church grow?" Do not be swept away by the special experts, promotional programs, big boom and bust extravaganzas that appeal to the fleshly lusts of people to be coddled and

entertained. Talk rather about preaching the gospel in its purity and simplicity without compromise, both positively and negatively. That is the way the church grew after it began. The young and restless, wise and scholarly of our day have not, will not, cannot, improve on that regardless of all of their "hot air" that boasts of big crowds.

The Same Old Gospel

That which is taught must be the old gospel of the Bible. We cannot solve problems with a "social gospel" that concentrates only on the physical. The social gospel is insipid and anemic. The ways of Dale Carnegie cannot replace the gospel. Such might woo and win numbers, but it will not convert and change the person into favor with God.

That which denies the Word, the reality of heaven and hell, contends there is no right or wrong, and that there is no eternity, but only the here and now cannot help mankind, but only can contribute to the deepening of man's problems. Social reform without spiritual regeneration is cosmetic. It is like putting a band-aid on cancer. It may make somebody feel good and think they are doing something worthwhile, but it is just show.

Men need to be converted and only the Word of God can do that. How tragic it is that many become malcontent with the gospel and seek something new rather than contending for what is true. How many times are we warned not to tamper with, add to, take from, nor alter in any way what God has said? How often are we assured that what we do must be done with divine authority? But how many really pay serious attention to what the Bible tells us?

The gospel heard must be the simple gospel (First Corinthians 1:26; 2:3,4). There is no room for the demonstrations of alleged personal genius and ego manifestations. So many are impressed with some man, not the message. This may be why some seem overwhelmed with the desire to impress others that they are "wise men," but are not really gospel preachers on the cutting edge in the battle for souls on God's side. The

result of such as this has produced in our time a horrendous digression, compromise of truth, and apostasy.

Blind Leaders

We again send forth the warning concerning the dangerous emphasis on that which is called the "highly schooled and educated clergy." This is not an anti-education or anti-intellectual statement. The so-called "scholar" is probably the one who is most likely to leave the truth and follow the paths of his own "wisdom." We have known of elderships who have restricted their inquiries for gospel preachers only to those who have a Master's Degree from some school. (Lest some think this is "sour grapes," I have mine. So what!) How long does it take what seems to be otherwise intelligent people to realize that theological knowledge does not necessarily mean Biblical knowledge? Some are ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (Second Timothy 3:7). It is because they are ever learning the philosophies and doctrines of men rather than of Christ.

Standards for Preachers

Do you realize that the standards some churches use for preachers would disqualify most of the apostles who were "*unlearned*" men, not having the formal schooling of the day? The apostles were not uninformed nor lacking in intelligence. They just did not fill themselves with what men thought and then declared themselves the experts. Just listen to some preachers stalking about like proud peacocks boasting of degrees, seeking to display their irrelevant learning, using high sounding words to impress the little man in the pew, showing more what they do not know about the Scriptures than what they know.

Three men were listening to one these stuffed shirts and one turned to the other and asked, "What's he talking about?" The second responded, "He doesn't say." The third overheard them and commented, "But he must be smart. I don't understand a thing he is saying."

If brethren would return to the good day when they sought preachers and teachers who knew the Book, loved the Book, lived the Book, taught the Book, and "put the hay down where the calves are," the church would avoid many ills and solve many others.

A Way Versus The Way

The gospel preached must be the certain and sound gospel. We are not to preach "a way," but are to preach "the way." Many are proclaiming doubt, maybe-so's, speculations, some even contending that nobody can really know anything for sure. It is strange how that they are so sure nobody can know anything for sure.

We need people who will speak as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11), using sound words that cannot be condemned (Titus 2:1,8), with certainty and clarity, "*speaking the truth in love*" (Ephesians 4:15), without ambiguity, not double-tongued with uncertainties derived from the doctors of philosophy and human misrepresentation. Some say we cannot know anything for certain but that the best we can do is strive for truth. How do they know that? They are so certain about that being true! Any philosophy such as that "shoots itself in the foot," and is not worth following. Those that advocate such nonsense ought be marked and branded for what they are, false teachers, servants of the devil, dividers of brethren, deceivers of men. Truth is revealed, available, and within our ability to know it and live it (John 8:32; First John 2:2; Ephesians 3:3,4).

The Whole Counsel

The gospel that is the solution to the ills of mankind must be the militant gospel of Christ, being taught both positively and negatively, being the whole counsel of God. This does not give license to be ugly or deliberately offensive to anybody. But let us understand that truth offends those who do not want or love it. While we are not to be a contentious people, just out looking for a fight, trying to pick a fight, we must realize that a fight is being waged between truth and error, the Lord and Satan, righteousness and unrighteousness, and it is our task to be soldiers of the cross and fight the good fight.

The timid, passive, soft approach, as if one is ashamed of the gospel, is not what pleases the Lord. We are to contend for the faith as with "fixed bayonets," because we are in an eternal life or eternal death struggle for ourselves, our children, our neighbors, and all those around us.

The solution to man's ills is never to be found in the fields of politics, economics, secular education, military power, nor even religion per se. While each of these may have contributions, they do not contain what man needs. Man's problem is sin and God has provided the only answer there is and that answer is Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Each one needs to be a promoter, defender, and participant in the way of Christ if he truly wishes to make significant contributions to the solution of the ills of mankind.

* * * * *

The Authority of The Eldership

You may not agree with what is taught in this lesson, but if you do not at first agree, let me kindly say to you that you now have an opportunity to learn something you need to learn, and correct your views. There are various threats to the Lord's church at this time, one of which is rebellion against authority.

First Samuel 12:13-15, when Samuel was introducing Saul, the first king, to the nation, "*Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen and whom ye have desired! And, behold, the Lord hath set a king over you. If ye will fear the Lord and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the Lord your God. But if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of*

the Lord, then shall the hand of the Lord be against you, as it was against your fathers."

First Samuel 15:22,23, after Saul's failure to destroy the Amalekites as commanded, "*And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity. Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.*" Calling rebellion as witchcraft he assigns rebellion as running roughshod over Deity, claiming to have the rights and powers of Deity, claiming to do that which only belongs to Deity. Rebellion is disrespect and disregard of authority, the defiance of commands, acting contrary to authority and/or without authority. It is the opposite of obedience and submission.

We see rebellion in civil affairs, in the home, against parents, in the schools against teachers and rules. It is quite evident in religion, and even in the church from time to time. There be those who claim to have a "liberty" which they do not have before God. They are the "do-your-own-thing" people. They use various authorities such as a clergy, theologians, feelings, ancestors, creeds, majority rule, status quo, venerable men and other non-authoritative sources when they should conform to the authority of Christ as revealed in the Bible. We shall concern ourselves with but one area of authority and rebellion and that is regarding the government of the Lord's church as it relates to the elderships of congregations.

God's Government

The government of the church is determined by Biblical revelation. "What works" is not the standard. All authority belongs to Christ (Matthew 28:18), and He is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18). The apostles were given authority by Christ through the guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 14,15,16; First Corinthians 2:12,13; Matthew 16:19; 18:18). The will of the Lord that was once embodied in inspired men is now embodied in inspired Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,17). When one

uses the Word as authority he will speak as the Word speaks (First Peter 4:11). He will learn that there is no organizational form larger than the local church. The local church is overseen by qualified men called elders, bishops, pastors, shepherds, presbyters. Local churches had both elders and deacons (Philippians 1:1). There were elders in every church (Acts 14:23). His way works.

Contrary to what is sometimes heard from the prating of men who seek control, elderships do have authority over the local church. It is disappointing to read from the pens of some who call themselves "brethren" the challenges of this Biblical truth. They say the idea that elderships have authority is alien to the New Testament, worldly, borne of naive Biblical scholarship, and the King James Version. (Time after time, rebels show their utter hatred toward the KJV. Little wonder they hate it! It stands between them and their goals to dominate, subvert, change, and restructure the church. Modern versions advocate the false positions these rebels have taken. In them rebels find more latitude to believe and practice whatever they want.) Some have said elderships have no authority at all. Others have said they have authority only as examples. Such people only betray their contempt for plain and clear Scripture.

They Are Not Perfect

Elders are not always what they ought to be. Is that news? Elderships are sometimes disobeyed by some members. Is that news? But to contend that elderships have no authority, except possibly as examples (something everybody ought to be and have), is grossly and reprehensibly wrong. One liberal "scholar" has written an article where he took one Greek word that means authority and tried to show it was never used with reference to the eldership. But he omitted nearly a dozen other words that affirm the very thing he denied. Even the word he cited demands obedience, the same kind of obedience that is to be given to the eldership. Such is not "scholarship" but dishonest sophistry, unsound doctrine, and digressive heresy. But so it is so often with the self-acclaimed "learned."

If elderships have authority, then it is rebellion to deny it. It is rebellion against the source that grants elderships authority. If elderships have no authority, it is usurpation of authority to claim it for them. Just whose authority is usurped must also be established. Seeing the Lord's attitude toward rebellion, this is a serious matter whichever way one goes. Numbers sixteen tells of Korah, Dothan, and Abiram who challenged the authority of Moses. That challenge was considered a challenge to the authority of God because God had granted authority to Moses. The result was God's wrath against that faction and their ultimate destruction.

His Duties

When one considers the duties assigned to elders he is forced to admit they have authority. Acts 20:28, "*Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers...*" Does not this grant authority for their self-examination? Do they not also have at the same stroke authority over the flock as well as themselves? Is not the authority to discharge a duty inherent in the charge of that duty? Certainly!

Acts 20:31, "*Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn everyone night and day with tears.*" Do not watchmen have duties? What value is there to attentiveness and vigilance when they are powerless to do anything about what is seen? Why warn the watchers if they are helpless and have no right to do anything about what they see?

First Timothy 3:4,5, "*One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity, (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)*" To rule literally means to rule with authority. Taking care of the church was equated with the rule of a father over the home. This is not of a worldly source, but Scripture. Are fathers limited in ruling the house to merely being an example? Cannot fathers command their children as did Abraham (Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 32:46; Proverbs 22:6)?

First Timothy 5:17, "*Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor*

in the word and doctrine." Again, elders are to rule. This means to take the lead, preside over, oversee, superintend. This means they possess authority.

First Thessalonians 5:12,13, "*And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.*" Those who are "over" the brethren are to be esteemed because of the work they do. They are "over" the brethren because they have authority. They have the power to direct and command. This is the same word used in Acts twenty-six by Paul when referring to his attitude toward Agrippa, the ruler of the land and one in authority. It means to come before one of authority. Away forever with the false doctrine that elderships have no authority. It is a sinister attempt to seize power to inject whatever somebody wants into the bloodstream of the church without anybody having power to call their hand.

Hebrews 13:7, "*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.*" Remember, be mindful, of your leaders. They are those who are over you and who rule over you. This is in a religious context, not in the context of a civil official.

Hebrews 13:17, "*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.*" Again, the ones to be remembered are the ones to be obeyed. They watch for the souls of those under their authority, and will be held accountable for each one. Will they be held accountable yet denied the necessary authority to carry out what they are charged to do?

Hebrews 13:24 salutes "*those that have the rule over you.*" This refers to the same men as Titus 1:7, "*For a bishop must be blameless as the steward of God...*" A steward is an overseer, possessing delegated authority. He is an administrator, manager, and superintendent.

What Is Behind This Rebellion?

We have already noted that some want to be “free” to do whatever they want and elderships prevent them from doing that. But we wonder why this outburst of rejection of the authority of elderships? There are several reasons. While we have no desire or intent to judge motives of proponents of this false doctrine, we do judge the fruits and want to discover the source of it.

The “pastor system,” preachers ruling things, the doctrine called “evangelistic authority” has captivated some who are more ambitious than informed. Preachers have authority, but their authority is to preach the Word. Titus 2:15, “*Rebuke with all authority.*” The word here means by the way of commandment, giving a charge, backed by the authority of God. A preacher is A leader but he is not THE leader. Paul, when he wished to teach those who had charge of things, did not send for the preachers but for the elders.

Certainly, there is the tragic abuse and misuse of authority. First Peter 5:3 warns of lording over brethren. I had one elder to tell me that when a boss tells the employee to move that box, the employee must move that box. I told him that is fine between bosses and employees and box moving, but he was not boss and his brethren were not his employees, and we were not moving boxes. He had the dictator attitude toward his position and he abused his authority. He must have thought when made an elder he had been crowned king. Diotrophes had this problem of desiring to be “big dog in the kennel,” loving preeminence among brethren, doing as he arbitrarily saw fit. We must distinguish between using and abusing authority. The very prohibition of abusing power indicates that the right use of power had been granted. This is one reason for not allowing a novice to become an elder lest his lack of understanding and immaturity allow him to abuse authority.

Too many have simply not studied God’s government. They like to imitate what they think “works” as practiced by denominations. Some are even impressed with a democratic form of government in the church. They call it “majority rule,” and sometimes it seems more of a mob rule because of the disorderly way some rebellious ones try to take over the church to their own

satisfaction. The "one man - one vote" doctrine is not applicable in the Lord's church. It may be in other organizations, religious and secular. But this is not the way God's church operates. Rebellion, pride, arrogance, rule or ruin attitudes exist. We should never be protective of abuses of authority and power. But we must be protective of the oversight God has given elderships. Such rebellion is often born of the disposition of contempt for "oughtness," and as stated, a wholesale distaste for the King James Version. (They would forbid elderships from forbidding teaching from perverted versions, the kind liberals love and use.)

The Nature of Their Authority

There are various areas of authority that belong to elderships. Their authority is delegated and limited according to God's Word. They never have authority greater than God. God must always be placed before civil government, parents, elderships, or anyone and anything else. We cannot set aside His will to obey men when men would direct us contrary to His revealed will. We cannot make obligations optional, however. We cannot alter the necessity of baptism for the remission of sins, or the restrictions on women being forbidden to preach, or follow practices that would disassemble the assembly rather than assembling brethren, or change when to observe the Lord's Supper, or many other matters where God has spoken. (It is a sorry tale to learn how some contend women may teach mixed classes and preach if the elders approve. Elders cannot approve what God does not.)

Neither can we bind something optional, some custom, some human opinion, as if it was the law of God. Elderships have not this right. Some have tried to redefine Christianity with demands untaught in Scripture, forbidding the church to do certain works that are authorized in Scripture for both individuals and churches.

Elders are to see that the church they oversee fulfills its divinely appointed mission. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth. They are to convict the gainsayer, keep the church pure, feed the flock the truth, keeping

peace among brethren, not by compromise or negotiation, but by a firm, kind, inflexible stand for truth. Executing these duties will often call for the exercise of judgment. Here is the realm of their authority and activity. Only one bent on rebellion will scoff at the contention, "Someone must make decisions." Every group of people must have someone in charge to make decisions. It is true with the Lord's church also. The Lord has placed that duty, with authority, on the eldership.

The authority of an eldership is limited to one congregation. While there are to be elders in every church (Acts 14:23), they have the oversight of the "*flock which is among you*" (First Peter 5:3). The doctrine and practice of satellite churches, many small churches operating under one super eldership, is not Biblical. It is apostasy that has already been experienced many times in the religious realm. We must recognize that there simply is no larger organization of the church than the local church, and elders have the oversight of the local church, and their authority is limited thereto.

While elders are not perfect, individually nor collectively, (and I have known but only one or two who ever seemed to think they were), good elderships do not claim to be. But their authority is unmistakable, and the duty of the congregation toward them is unmistakable. To rebel against it to rebel against the God who gave it.

* * * * *

What Shall I Do With Jesus?

Matthew 27:17-23, "*Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? For he knew that for envy they had delivered him. When he was set down on the judgment seat, his wife sent unto him, saying, Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream*

because of him. But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus. The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas. Pilate said unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified. And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified."

Our subject is one of the questions Pilate asked. The setting of the inquiry is familiar to Bible students, the climax of the trials of Jesus. The same question asked by Pilate has been ringing through the years as each one hears of Jesus and realizes that they must give answer.

The very nature of Jesus Christ demands that each one give answer what he or she will do with Jesus. His claims, His offer, His word, and work necessitates making an answer. People have answered the question in a variety of ways. But nearly all the ways one can imagine were suggested in the New Testament.

"Crucify Him"

When the Jews at Jesus' trial were asked, they said, "*Let him be crucified.*" To them, disposing of Him was the answer. It is interesting to recall how some years ago the Roman pope forgave all the Jews of crucifying Christ and declared the Jews would not longer be held responsible. Isn't it amazing how false teachers rewrite Biblical revelation in their pursuit of "getting along?"

In possibly less offensive language, many since that day long ago have taken a similar attitude toward Jesus. They would put to death His cause, His name, His teaching, and do so by force if necessary. They would erase from the world the existence of His church. But such a response does not dispose of Christ nor His cause for they are eternal in nature.

Sell Him

Others have given answer similar to the acted answer of Judas. "I'll sell Him." Judas, for thirty pieces of silver,

about the legal price of a slave at that time, betrayed the Lord to His enemies. Instead of allowing himself to be used by Jesus for good, as he had been called, Judas was willing to use Jesus for his own evil and gain. Betrayal by those in whom you ought and feel you can trust is one of life's most painful experiences. Many gospel preachers, as well as husbands and wives, have known first hand just what this is.

Judas was one who once walked with Christ, but turned and sold Him. How many, even who also once walked with Christ, have turned from Him and given their efforts to rend asunder His doctrine? Solomon once said, "*Buy the truth, and sell it not.*" (Proverbs 23:23). The worst deal one could ever make is to sell Christ and His Word. There is nothing this world can offer that could be equal to what is sold.

Forsake Him

Closely related to the attitude of Judas is the attitude many of Jesus' disciples took during His personal ministry. "We'll forsake Him and go with Him no more." Jesus saw this happen even among His apostles at the time He was seized (Matthew 26:56). They all forsook Him and fled. But even during His ministry some considered what Jesus taught to be too hard and refused to follow Him any further (John 6:66).

Jesus often spoke words that pertained to the sins of His hearers. They would be repulsed by them, not realizing that He was telling them the truth and for their own good. They would follow Him as long as He provided "loaves and fishes," doing miracles of compassion and healing. But when He loved them enough to correct them, they reacted by rejecting both Him and His teaching.

It doubtless was fear on the part of the apostles that led them to flee at the time He was seized in the Garden of Gethsemane. Doubtless today it is fear that prevents some from standing up and being counted for Christ. Some have decided it is better to forsake Him. They evidently prefer the praises of men than the consequences of remaining loyal to Christ.

Persecute Him

Some have answered the question, "What shall I do with Jesus?" with the answer, by word and deed, "I shall persecute Him." Persecution was commonplace to those of the early church. Both Jews and Gentiles would persecute Christians. Persecution unto death was a dreadful but frequent experience among the early members of the body of Christ. To persecute God's people is also to persecute Him (Acts 9:3,4). Saul of Tarsus persecuted the church, thinking he was serving the Lord, but in so doing, Jesus told him he was also persecuting Him. As surely as doing good in His name is to do good unto Him (Matthew 25:40), the heaping of difficulties upon His cause and His followers is to persecute Him.

The book of Hebrews speaks of even crucifying Christ afresh when describing just how abominable it is to apostatize. It is consoling to know that the Lord identified Himself with His persecuted people, such as Stephen for example (Acts 7).

Stay Neutral

But others have tried to take a neutral position regarding Jesus the Christ. I say they have tried, but they cannot do so because the very nature of Christ and His religion removes the possibility of being neutral. We must remember how the Lord said, Matthew 12:30, "*He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.*" Even if some make the attempt to be neutral, their decision not to be FOR Christ is, as Jesus taught, a decision to be AGAINST Him.

Partial Service

Others seem to have the disposition, "I'll serve Him but not exclusively." As unreasonable as it is, this is the attitude of those who claim to be disciples of Christ but who refuse to leave the sins of this world. They seem to think they can have both Christ and something else, even that which is contradictory to Christ.

Matthew 6:24, "*No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold*

to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." Nothing brought the wrath of God upon Israel quicker and surer than when they attempted to serve both God and Baal. To be a true disciple of Christ, a clear severance from the sins of this world is as necessary as putting on the new man of righteous living.

Wait A While

Felix, when confronted with the truth, and seeing the necessity to decide regarding Him, decided, "I'll postpone my decision." Did he really postpone a decision, or did he make a decision that refused to acknowledge Christ? We only deceive ourselves when we think we can acceptably postpone deciding for Christ when we already know what we must do, how we must come to Him, and know there is no other way. The decision to postpone is to decide to reject Him. Should one die, not having come to Christ, but having only decided to "wait" until it was more convenient, shall he be saved or shall he be condemned? The answer is certain and easily determined. Only by coming to Christ has one made the soul-saving decision. Postponement is faulty and destructive to the soul.

Almost

"What shall I do with Christ?" is sometimes answered in the same way Agrippa tried to answer. He was almost persuaded. Paul, upon hearing that response, simply noted the great difference between almost and altogether. Acts 26:29, *"And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether, such as I am, except these bonds."* Paul earnestly desired that one and all could know the joy and salvation that he knew in Christ.

Being almost saved simply means to remain lost. Like the attitude of postponement, if one is called upon to face God in judgment having almost come to Christ, he will simply be denied entrance into heaven. Being almost saved, again like postponement, is affording Satan additional opportunities to intervene, harden your heart, persuade you to run away from doing what you know you must do., We have seen so many who were

almost saved, but many of them died altogether lost because they never did what they must to go to heaven.

Come to Christ

In John six when some were abandoning Christ because of His teaching, Christ asked essentially the same question of His disciples that Pilate asked of His enemies. *"Will you also go away?"* The answer that Peter gave should stir our hearts. John 6:68,69, *"Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou has the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."* This must be our response to the question also if we are to be saved.

Upon hearing the gospel of Christ, faith in Christ is the first step in coming to Him, to be followed by repentance of sins, confession of our faith in Christ, and baptism in water into Christ by His authority for remission of sins. Consider the words of Pilate as they are incorporated into one of our songs, "What will you do with Jesus? The question comes to you. And you must give an answer for something you must do. What shall it be?"

* * * * *

Pentecost: The Beginning

In Acts chapter two we read of a most significant event that occurred on the day of Pentecost. Pentecost was a Jewish feast day, the feast of weeks. Because of wheat harvest it is also called the feast of harvest, coming fifty days after the Passover, the most holy of the Jewish celebrations. It was also a great day of beginning regarding the religion of Christ. We focus on the first Pentecost after the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ.

The apostles were in one place when the Holy Spirit came upon them as Christ had promised (John 14,15,16; Luke 24; Acts 1). They spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance, guided and directed in the message preached.

Peter, along with the eleven, preached the sermon recorded in this second chapter. The events of the day marked the beginning of several important things.

It marked the beginning of the fulfillment of prophecies relating to the kingdom of God, such as were foretold in Isaiah 2, Micah 2, Joel, 2, Daniel 2, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Peter later said that all the prophets foretold of those days (Acts 3:24). Christ and John the Baptist had recently preached that the kingdom was "*at hand*." It had been prophesied by messengers of God as to the time, place, and circumstances that would be the beginning.

The promised kingdom began that day. That kingdom is also called the church (Colossians 1:13). Those who heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel that day were added to the church, or kingdom. Everything that had transpired prior to that day pointed to the coming of that day, and from this day forward the Scriptures point backward to it.

This also marked the beginning of the new covenant. Jeremiah 31:31-34 was a prophecy of the new covenant. Hebrews, a book that among other things shows the superiority of Christ and His law above that of Moses, chapter eight and verse eight, quotes Jeremiah and shows the new covenant of Christ as the covenant Jeremiah foretold. Christ took away the first covenant in order to establish the second (Hebrews 10:9,10).

Pentecost also marked the beginning of the gospel through which God remits the sins in the name of Jesus Christ. Jesus had stated, prior to His ascension, Luke 24:46,47, "*And he said unto them, This it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.*" In Peter's sermon he announced the terms of forgiveness that include repentance and baptism in the name of Christ (Acts 2:38). Before Pentecost forgiveness may well have been granted another way. But now that the new covenant had become a reality, remission of sins in the name of, or by the authority of, Christ included these conditions. John had baptized with a baptism of repentance for the

remission of sins (Acts 19:4; Mark 1:4), looking forward to His coming. But from the day of Pentecost until even now remission of sins in the name of Christ follows the same process as announced on that glorious day.

The Church Began

Obviously with Pentecost marking the beginning of the kingdom, it also marked the beginning of the reign of Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords. Acts 2:30-33 affirms this as the day of His coronation because He was now exalted, having received God's promise, being by the right hand of God, which refers to a place of unequaled rank and authority. When Christ returns as He has promised, He will not set up His kingdom but deliver up His kingdom to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24). It is then that the last enemy, death, will be destroyed in the resurrection. John 5:28,29, *"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."*

Christ now reigns and will reign until then. Daniel 7:13,14 is Daniel's prophecy of the Son of man returning to the Ancient of days, Jesus returning to the Father, and receiving the kingdom. Christ was given His kingdom after His ascension. The day He took the throne and the day the kingdom began was this wonderful day of Pentecost.

The Way to be Saved

Pentecost marked the necessity of baptism for the remission of sins in the name of Christ. Objectors to baptism often cite such people as the thief on the cross as an example how even people today can be saved. Of course, they cannot prove the thief was not baptized just as none can prove he was. Regardless of that, nobody was ever commanded to be baptized for the remission of sins in the name of Christ prior to Pentecost. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the many who lived before Pentecost were never commanded to be baptized in the name of Christ. But from Pentecost forward this is the command the people heard, believed, and obeyed. Every example of

conversion following Pentecost culminates and finalizes with the one who needed salvation being baptized.

The Last Days

This was also the beginning of the last days, the last age. The Bible presents three dispensations, three periods and three systems how God has government mankind. These are called, for want of better terms, Patriarchal, Mosaic, and Christian ages. The Christian age will end when Christ returns and the earth ceases to be (Second Peter 3:10). When He comes there will be the resurrection of the dead (John 11:24; 5:28,29), and the judgment. There will not be another age after this one. (If there is to be a literal one thousand year reign of Christ on earth in Jerusalem, as some teach, then this is not the last age as Scripture teaches. Were the writers of Scripture wrong when they said this was the last age? They were not! The teachers of the fanciful, speculative theories such as premillennialism are those who are wrong.)

The last days refers to the age of the new covenant, the time of the kingdom, which is now almost two thousand years old. We must not confuse the "*last days*" with the "*last day*." The last day, or final day, will close the last days. But the last days began with Pentecost.

This exceptional day also marked the beginning of the work of taking the gospel to the world. Mark 16:15, Matthew 28:19,20, Luke 24:46,47, and Acts 1:8 are records of the Lord's charge or commission to His disciples to preach the gospel to every creature in the world. It is a marvelous wonder that we read how the gospel was taken to the known world in the immediate period following (Colossians 1:23). Every generation must take the gospel to every creature.

Pentecost marked the beginning of the work of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of mankind. John 16:7-14 are words that Jesus spoke to His apostles, the promises of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them, and how they would be guided, directed, and have every truth brought to their mind by inspiration. Acts 2:1-4 tells of this taking place. Through the preaching of the Word of God as done by the apostles, the Holy Spirit works in

converting the hearts of people to Christ, leading and guiding them unto salvation and how to live as a saved one. Everyone who is saved is saved by the work of the Holy Spirit. But none are saved by the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. None are saved by some miraculous event. All who are saved are saved because the Word, as given by and through the Holy Spirit, is preached. The gospel is God's power to save (Romans 1:16), and the gospel is the instrument used by Deity to convert people to Christ. The Word of God is called the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17).

Greatest Since Creation

Of all the beginnings since the creation recorded in Genesis, the most notable one by far is that which occurred on the first Pentecost after the ascension of Christ. (1) Prophecies were fulfilled. (2) The kingdom, or church, became a reality. (3) The reign of Christ began. (4) The work of the Holy Spirit to convert man by and through the means of the Word had its beginning then. (5) The plan of salvation in the name of Christ, including baptism by His authority for the remission of sins, was first proclaimed that day. (6) The new covenant by which we are saved was announced on Pentecost. (7) The last age began.

There is yet another beginning we must consider. It is our own beginning in the new life as a Christian. We speak of the new birth (John 3:1-5). Becoming a Christian is like starting anew, a new creature in Christ (Second Corinthians 5:17). If anyone is going to heaven he must make that journey. None can reach the goal without making the start. We start, begin, by obeying the gospel in faith, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. Unless one has this beginning, the end is certain doom. May we encourage one and all to begin anew in Christ, giving thanks for the many glorious beginnings that took place nearly two thousand years ago on that day that is called Pentecost, the day Peter called "*the beginning*" (Acts 11:15).

* * * * *

I Hope You Understand, But I Have Some Fine Sons!

Mark it off as just parental pride and boasting if you like. I suppose that element is in here. But there is also a thing called giving honor to whom honor is due. And that is really what is meant by this paragraph. I have three sons and one son-in-law that I consider my fourth son. They are of that generation many call "baby-boomers." But these are not your typical baby-boomers because they are strong faithful Christian men if ever four did live. No father could ever be more blessed than I when I consider my boys. Much evil and error pours from those of that generation, but not from my boys. They are men of God. I do not suggest they are perfect by my next comment, but I can say of any one of my boys what the Father said to Jesus, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased." Glory to God, and thanks for their mother! JWB

The Last Word

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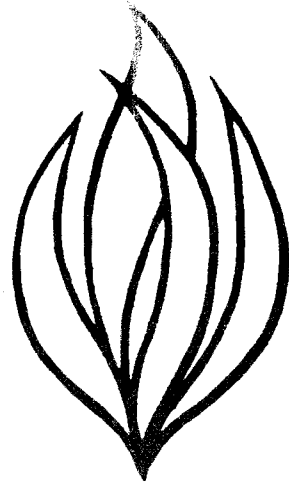
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*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*

* * * * *

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The Voice of the People

This lesson is a restatement of basic and fundamental convictions. Many of the things shall be general in nature. All in all, we shall consider a wide variety of points.

There is usually a great interest in what is learned from polls. Polls are taken to find out what people think of this or that subject. Even though often unreliable, polls are useful for candidates for public office because they want to know what is the voice of the people, and what people think about the candidates, events, issues, and attitudes. Polls not only measure opinion but they also have the power to influence opinion. People have a tendency to follow what other people do and think. Many things have been produced by concentrating on what the polls reflect. The attitude that "everybody's doing it" has taken many people the direction they decide to go. Attitudes are contagious. People follow people.

We read of prison riots in one state and before long inmates in other prisons even in other states take their cue and riot also. Let a group of disgruntled students go on a binge of destructive havoc and soon students from other schools engage in similar misconduct. What people do and think is important in itself. But its importance is enhanced in its power to influence others.

There is a story that about one hundred years before Christ two brothers revolted against power in the direction of a democratic action. "Vox populi; Vox Dei" became a widely used phrase. Translated it means, "The voice of the people is the voice of God." That provokes an interesting thought. It simply means, in the minds of many, that whatever most people think is what should be considered right. It was the attitude and slogan in the French Revolution, English Revolution, and other actions taken to listen to and heed the "voice of the people." Whatever the majority thinks, says, wants,

rules is to be considered right. The “voice of the people” becomes the standard.

In our own nation this attitude has been prominent. America, while trying to find a happy middle ground with emphasis on the individual and the rights of each person, making attempts to protect minorities, has also promoted the attitude of “the voice of the people.” A monarchy is the most efficient form of government because what the king says is law. Our forefathers chose a republic to put power into the hands of the people through representatives rather than a king or monarch. Power has the ability to corrupt those who possess it. Power in the hands of the people is thought to protect against such corruption. But what happens when the people become corrupt? The “voice of the people” rule has its problems as well as other forms of rule.

These weaknesses in political affairs are harmful although understandable. But what is true politically is not always true in the religious realm. It is hard for some to understand that what might be desirable in governing a nation cannot be acceptable in serving God. Right and wrong in matters of morality and religious truth is not determined by “the voice of the people.” Too often people have removed themselves from the voice of God and ignored the fact that God is supreme, and His kingdom is just that, a kingdom. Jesus Christ is King and the form of government is that of a monarchy, not a democracy or majority rule. The majority, as far as serving God is concerned, is usually out of step with God.

Before the Flood

Notice a few illustrations. Consider the time prior to the flood of Noah (Genesis 6:5,6). The majority were wicked and deserved destruction, receiving what was deserved. In Numbers 21:5, the majority of the people of Israel murmured against God and spake against Him and Moses. At Sinai, the majority called for the construction of the golden calf and brought God’s wrath against Israel (Exodus 32:1,6,9). Later in Israel’s history, First Samuel 8:19, the people wanted a form of government like the nations around them rather than allow God to continue

to rule as He had been doing. Should the majority be followed when the majority goes against God?

In the New Testament, Matthew 13:15, it was obvious that the majority was dull of hearing, hardened of heart, closing their eyes to what they should see, and preventing understanding. Over and over we find throughout the Bible examples of the foolishness to listen to "the voice of the people." Remember, the "voice of the people" cried, "*Crucify him, Crucify him.*"

The Religious Division

Many are puzzled by the manifold divisions that exist in the religious world. Much of it is due to the fact that so many people allow themselves to be so heavily influenced by what most do, or what many do. "Can so many be wrong?" is the question asked. "Are all of these people lost?" we hear questioned. But we must keep in mind what Jesus said about the few and the many in Matthew 7:13,14. Certainly most can be wrong. The Bible records time and again that most were wrong. Being in the majority does not prove you are right or wrong. It only shows you are in the majority.

Christians must be alert that they cannot follow the multitude to do evil (Exodus 23:2), and still follow Christ. The young and old are subject to pressures to conform to this world, but we are warned against doing that (Romans 12:1,2). Consider a few issues where this realization is applicable.

Look at the moral permissiveness of our day! Permissiveness has given birth to the erosion of morality. Sensuality is encouraged, even promoted. Sexual perversion is finding social acceptance. Premarital and extramarital sexual relationships are common place, but they are still fornication and adultery regardless of what the majority says or does, thinks or condones. Drinking alcoholic beverages has been approved by the Biblically ignorant and spiritually rebellious nation in which we live. But does this mean the majority is right? CERTAINLY NOT!

Materialism, in its two senses, meets the approval of the masses. In one sense materialism denies God, life after death, heaven, hell, the reality of the soul, man's accountability to God, the coming judgment. Is the "voice of the people" right?

Materialism in another sense is the pursuit and worship of the false god of having material things, money being the supreme god. Even if most say this is the way, does it make it the way? Has not such a pursuit and misuse of life produced unhappiness, contributing to reactions as bizarre as the "hippie movement" to counter materialism? If all served mammon and none served God, shall we join them? We cannot serve both!

No Fear of God

Our society suffers under a lack of respect for God. Rebellions against authority cuts a bitter swath in almost every area of activity. "Do your own thing" is the cry of the day. "We are the Pepsi generation." Profanity, taking God's name in vain, drugs, ridicule of sacred things and those who hold to sacred things is broadcast as entertainment. Just because others run the race toward hell, are we obligated to go along, or even stand idly by and not warn and persuade to a better way? Shall we heed the "voice of the people?"

Marriage, divorce and remarriage has been so distorted by the ungodly and even the religious teachers of our day to accommodate the sins people practice that the sanctity of the home is scarce and its disintegration evident in many quarters. Because so many are already so steeped in sin even many brethren have jumped on the devil's bandwagon and decided God's will does not work, contending there are many causes and acceptable reasons for divorce, remarriage as one desires to be remarried, compromising with the world. Are such things not simply additional evidences of the influence of the "voice of the people?"

In matters pertaining to the church, the way of salvation, manner of worship, who to fellowship and not fellowship, there seems to be a growing number who think we must "go along with others" and listen to the

“voice of the people.” It is most disturbing how the evidence is so strong that brethren, many who once were considered pillars of strength, have decided to act according to what is appealing, what most like, what is popular, what enhances their image and pleases the most people. Is this the kind of teaching we find acceptable from Scripture?

How Truth is Determined

Not only do some try to determine what they are going to do by checking “the voice of the people,” but are even trying to ascertain what is truth by “the voice of the people.” But we must learn and never waver from what we learn, that truth is not determined by what most do and want. Truth is not legislated by the church which is to be the pillar and ground of the truth. The church has no power to make, break, alter, or authorize divine law. The Christian must live, promote, and defend truth as revealed in the authority of truth, the Word of God. The hard fact of Christianity as relating to the “voice of the people” is that the church is not to be operated as a democracy, but with respect to the monarchy of God, Jesus Christ as King, His Word as all-authority. *“The law of the Lord is perfect”* (Psalm 19:7). It is not just A standard, it is THE standard, and THE ONLY standard.

The “voice of the people” should simply echo the voice of God. Those who truly follow God do not determine their ways by polls, nose counts, public opinion, what most like, or even what they think they might want and like, but by the inspired, infallible, inerrant, all-authoritative, all-sufficient Scripture (Second Timothy 3:17,17), without addition, subtraction, or alteration. Any other approach is tantamount to rebellion against the voice of God.

Being a Christian is not being a weather vane, pointing whichever way the popular winds might be blowing. He does not drift with the current. He does not check to find out what might “succeed” with others before he decides what to believe and do. The voice of the Christian must be the voice of conviction, not one of convenience. “What would the Lord have me be, do, say, think, and defend?” is his watchword. He can only learn what this involves

from His Word. Christians hear and heed the voice of God through Christ and His inspired Word, not “the voice of the people.”

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About the Lord's Supper

In the early centuries of Christianity there was much uninspired writing as well as the inspired Scripture. They are interesting to study even though they are not authoritative. They have historical and informational value. They are called the Ante-Nicene writings because they were written before the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. Among them are the writings of Justin Martyr who was born in 114 A. D., not far removed from apostolic days.

In one of his writings he described the weekly worship of the Christians. “And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased the president (meaning the one who presides, JWB) verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succor the orphans and widows, and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it

is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead. For he was crucified on the day before that of Saturn; and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun having appeared to His apostles and disciples He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration." (Ante-Nicean Christian Library, Vol. II: pp.65-66).

An Item of Worship

The Lord's Supper is one of the five New Testament avenues of worship authorized by the Word of God. The others are singing, praying, teaching, and giving. There is no authority for burning incense, using instruments of music, burning candles, or any other act than what is noted in the New Testament. Christians today confine themselves to what the New Testament authorizes as the New Testament teaches (Colossians 3:17).

The early Christians met on the first day of the week to engage in these authorized acts of worship. We do not rely on uninspired writings to know this, but Scripture (Acts 20:7; First Corinthians 16:1,2; Hebrews 10:25; First Corinthians 11). The first day of the week is not the "Christian Sabbath." The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week and is not authorized as the day of assembly for Christians as is the first day.

Many religious people observe the Lord's Supper once per month, or once per quarter, semi-annually, on special "holy days," variously chosen celebrations, etc. But where is the authority to do such a thing? What we do must be as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11) and by the authority of Christ (Colossians 3:17).

The partaking of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week was once recognized by all, not just churches of Christ. We see from Justin Martyr this was true and it was the practice of the Greek Orthodox Church until the seventh century. Some continued this practice as late as the sixteenth century and John Calvin lamented how the practice was going out of style. But those who are determined to follow the New Testament as authority

accept what Scripture reveals and continue to follow the primitive practice every first day of the week, by divine authority. But more on the Lord's Supper itself.

This supper is described for us in four New Testament books (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and First Corinthians). The first three deal with the institution of it. Certain details are found in one record that are not found in another. Together, complementing each other, and without contradictions, we have the full account as Scripture denotes.

Paul to the Corinthians

We want to concentrate on First Corinthians 11:23-20, written by Paul in the middle of the first century, twenty or more years after the church began on Pentecost, with descriptions and instructions being revealed by and through the Holy Spirit. The fact that the passage is written to brethren proves that the Lord's Supper was not something just for the apostles but was to be a personal observance among brethren everywhere.

Verse twenty-three, *"For I have received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread; 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. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he has supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, you do show the Lord's death till he come."*

The Lord instituted the Supper the night He was betrayed. He was in an upper room with His disciples observing the last Passover. From some of the ingredients of the Passover Feast Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. He used unleavened bread and fruit of the vine. (Justin Martyr mentioned the use of water which was probably used to dilute any fermentation that might have taken place in the fruit of the vine, JWB). We are not given the liberty to use just any physical ingredient that some might like, but what the Scripture teaches.

Physical Ingredients Represent

The two physical ingredients beautifully symbolize the body and blood of Christ. They are representative. They did not become the actual body and blood of Christ because His body and blood was still intact before them even as this episode took place.

That this Supper is a memorial to Christ is proved by the Lord's own words, "*This do in remembrance of me.*" In partaking of the Lord's Supper we remember Christ and everything concerning Him, with emphasis on His death, burial, and resurrection. The Lord's Supper looks backward to God's provision for the salvation of man at Calvary. It also looks forward to the return of Christ because this Supper is to be observed "...till he come."

Actually, the Lord's Supper is to "*show*" or proclaim Christ. We might look upon it as a proclamation to the world as well as to each other the person, Jesus Christ, and what He has done for mankind. It is also an item of teaching as well as an item of worship. It is an expression of faith in Christ, a belief in that record of the past, and faith in that which is to occur in the future. When we realize the significance of the Lord's Supper we will be impressed with the seriousness of deliberately being absent from the assembly and the observance of it.

The Way We Partake

Our manner of observance is also important. It may be surprising to learn that this Supper which was given and intended to be soul-enriching can actually become soul-destroying if we do not partake of it in the proper manner. Beginning with verse twenty-seven, "*Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.*"

Observers of the Supper have a great responsibility to self and others to have the correct attitude and manner

at the time the Lord's Supper is partaken. The word "*unworthily*" refers to manner and attitude. "*Discerning*" concerns understanding. We must understand what we are doing and do what we do with a reverent and worshipful attitude and conduct. The frame of mind and behavior as well as comprehension of the significance of the Supper is of vital concern. This is a blessed privilege provided by the Lord for His people to show adoration and thanksgiving for Christ and recognition to God for what Deity has done on our behalf in salvation of our souls. It is an observance that can only be rightly observed by Christians; those who have heard the Word, believe in Christ, repented of sins, confessed their faith in Christ, and been baptized in water in the name of Christ for the remission of sins.

The Lord's Supper is a communion with God and each other. In the Lord's Supper we have fellowship, joint participation, one with another in glorifying Deity. It is never to be taken lightly, flippantly, but soberly thankfully, reverently, and seriously with discernment. Because Christ is holy, that which is a memorial to Him is also holy. There is much more to be said regarding the Lord Supper, but these thoughts suffice for the present.

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God's Charges Against His People

The texts that we shall consider pertained to the time when Israel was God's chosen nation. It is neither anti-semitic nor unbiblical to deny that Israel of today, or Jewish people today, still retain that special relationship. Galatians 3:28, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.*" Acts 10:34,35, "*Then Peter opened his mouth and 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.*"

God's Accusations

From Malachi we read of complaints that the Lord had against Israel. *"Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them, or, Where is the God of judgment?"* (2:17). *"Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee? Ye have said, It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered."* (3:13-15).

These passages have something in common. These are God's words of complaint against their words against Him, and the feigned innocence of Israel. When God complains against them they act as if they have no idea what God meant. Consider their words against God.

"I Loved You"

Malachi 1:2, *"I have loved you, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us?"* This was God's complaint against their ingratitude, which is a most cruel trait of character. Israel's history was marked with ingratitude. God gave promises to Abraham, their father. He chose Jacob instead of Esau as their forefather. He delivered them from Egypt and gave them a homeland, a glorious kingdom, with physical and spiritual provisions. *"I loved you,"* God said. They answered, *"How have you loved us?"* In other words, *"What did you ever do for us?"* Are we to suppose that God is any less displeased with people today that have been blessed by Him but who refuse to acknowledge Him and His blessings?

"You Despised Me"

Again, Malachi 1:6, *"A son honoreth his father and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where in mine honor? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name?"* Sons

honor fathers and servants respect their masters. If Israel claimed God as Father and Master they should honor and respect Him. But they did not. Even the priests are said to despise His name.

The word "*despise*" comes from the word meaning to consider lightly, look upon as unimportant, deliberately ignore. When one disobeys God's Word this is what he does. Sin is far worse than many think. This was even the attitude of Israel's religious leaders.

We cannot fail to see their pretended innocence. "*Wherein have we despised thy name?*" They acted as if they did not know what God meant. They had adopted idolatry, neglected God's commandments, served false gods, abused God's worship, offered blemished sacrifices, and still feigned they could not understand God's displeasure toward them.

"You are Guilty of Pollution"

Malachi, 1:7,8, "*Ye offered polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the Lord is contemptible. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts.*"

They had placed polluted bread on God's altar, sacrificed to God what was not even acceptable to others. The law called for sacrifices to God to be of the very best with unleavened bread, animals without spot or blemish, the firstfruits of their labors. But they were offering blind animals, lame and sick.

This charge was repeated in chapter one, verses twelve and thirteen. There it is mentioned how their offerings had become wearisome or burdensome to them. They got tired of worshipping God, God's way. They had "*snuffed*" at worshipping God as cattle does fodder that it dislikes.

God said that even their earthly rulers would not accept what they were offering to God. And can we be pleased with giving God what might be called the "leftovers,"

that for which we do not have further use? God says this is to despise His name.

They Got Things Backwards

Israel also exhibited the base form of depravity by calling good evil and evil good (2:17). Isaiah once wrote, *"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."* (Isaiah 5:20). Is not this what many are doing today? Does not this demonstrate grave disrespect for God's standard of good and evil and overturn God's judgments? Some cry long and loud that it is wrong to judge, but they are guilty of judging God by declaring good what He has called evil, and declaring evil what He has called good. They really do not mind judging. These people really dislike being told what the judgments of God are and how wrong they are to contradict Him. It is never wrong to condemn what God condemns, nor is it wrong to commend what God commends. Israel questioned whether God would even judge them at all. *"Wherein is the God of judgment?"* Like many living in our own time, they acted like whatever they did, God would not mind, and even if He did He would not do anything about it.

You Are Disobedient

Another charge against their words is found in Malachi 3:7. *"Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?"*

The Lord strikes against their apostasy, pleading with them to return to Him. Their response was that they did not know where or how they should return. They again acted as if they had nothing to leave and there was no reason for saying they should return to God. To them they had been doing everything just right already. They were denying they had ever left God. This is so often the case with those who forsake the Lord today. They like to pretend they never did leave. But those who leave the Lord, His church, His way, need to return to him.

You Robbed Me

Malachi 3:8, "*Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.*" Notice their question expressed their pretended innocence. In answer to God's question, we all know that man will rob God. God told Israel how they had robbed Him. They did it by not giving and offering as they should. By withholding their contributions that should have been given they were guilty of robbing God.

I heard a story from an older preacher how we went to a place to preach in a gospel meeting and the brethren approached him with what they considered to be a real problem. It seems one of the brethren was taking money out of the contribution plate as he would pass the plate among the congregation. They considered it as stealing from God. The preacher told them they should not be too concerned about brethren stealing from God because it was going on all over the brotherhood. When they heard this they were "comforted" because they were not the only ones, but they inquired about brethren stealing from God everywhere. The preacher told them how their man was stealing from God what others had given, but many were stealing from God by never giving what they should have been giving from the start. In either case there was the taking from God what should have been in His treasury. Yes, people rob God, not only of money, but time, thought, respect, obedience, and many other ways.

Malachi 3:13-15, a text already quoted at the start of the lesson, seems to describe the climax of Israel's rebellion against God. They considered it to be without profit to serve God. To them it was vain. They obviously wanted what some would call the "good life." They were happy in their pride. The wicked workers were set up and those who would tempt God were delivered. It really was not such a bad thing, some thought, to go their own way and do their own thing.

True Today

Is not this same thing being asserted in our land today? We hear people talking about how they go through life but once and they should get the most "gusto" out of it

that can, meaning they have the right to "live it up" anyway they see fit to live. Those who deny God think they are free to eat, drink, and be merry without consequences. To them it is useless to restrict yourself. They refuse to consider what the end result of their kind of life will bring them.

God declared that their words were stout against Him and He proved it to them. Their feigned innocence did not change the fact of their rebellious guilt. Trying to rationalize and explain away their transgressions did not remove their transgressions. God was not deceived by their words. The result was that Israel was the recipient of God's sharp and certain denunciation of both them and their sins. Malachi 4:1, *"For, behold the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud,, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch."*

In spite of their sins, God offered them forgiveness provided they would come the way of forgiveness. God loved them, but He did not approve of them. He told them of the coming salvation. The last verses of Malachi prophesied the coming of John the Baptist (Luke 1:17; Matthew 17:10-13), who was the forerunner of the Son of God who would shed His blood that would save the obedient (Hebrews 5:9).

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THERE IS CAUSE FOR SOME DEGREE OF OPTIMISM

when we hear and see more and more brethren speaking out and standing up for the truth against the vicious onslaughts of liberals who feel they are ordained of God to change the church into the likeness of denominations. The lines of demarcation are becoming more and more pronounced that divide those who continue to respect the need for Biblical authority and those who prefer to cater to the culture (often sub-culture) of our times with their digression from truth. While there is cause to rejoice at times, we must never slack in our determination to resist evil and do good. JB

In The Beginning

How and when did this world come into existence? This is a matter of concern that eventually confronts every serious minded person who seeks to understand the elementary matters of the world of which he is a part. When understood, the answer brings peace, joy, strength, purpose, and dignity. When left unresolved, it creates doubt, meaninglessness, unrest, uncertainty, and conduct that is destructive.

Acts 17:24-28, "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation: that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring."

We live in a universe of innumerable bodies that involves "natural" laws. We cannot escape acknowledging the existence of the universe. Where, when, and how did it come into existence, including man? Paul said God did it. In our time, many have forsaken this explanation and have turned to science to give us our answers.

Limitations of Science

Science is incapable of discovering origins. Do not minimize the magnitude of contributions from the field of science. But do not think it is without limit. Science is limited to what it can observe and measure. That fact places origins, such as our world, beyond its grasp.

Scientists have developed many theories about it, however. Some have said that matter, that which science

weighs, measures, and observes, is eternal in nature. Some have said the world came into being by accident, by random chance, a spontaneous event that somehow, some way, at some time, just happened, without reason or purpose. From that they have developed various theories about the origin of man, such as organic evolution and that man and all other living things, animal and vegetable, have come from the same accidentally produced cell. That their theories contradict each other, and are even self-contradictory, has not caused many of the "world's wise men" to discard them because they have only one other alternative which is God, and that explanation they have already decided they will not accept. One is naive to think that scientists are always open minded and honest with the evidence. It is interesting how, in the face of the fallacies of their theories, some scientists have simply abandoned the search for the answer and have announced there is no answer. If they do not know it, nobody can, they think.

The origin of this world cannot be seen, weighed, measured, and observed as it happened. There was no man to witness its beginning. Our answers must come from revelation. That is the only alternative. Our information from revelation is that the world was created by God (Genesis 1:1; Exodus 20:11).

Creation

What is the Biblical doctrine of creation? Both the Old and New Testaments contend that God is the Creator and is to be so worshipped. You remove or destroy this record, you destroy the integrity of any and all parts of the Biblical record. If the Scripture is false on this point there is no reason to have confidence in it on anything.

Creation was a free act of God whereby He, according to His sovereign will and for His own glory, in the beginning brought forth the whole visible and invisible universe without the use of pre-existing material. He brought it into being by the sheer power of His Word.

The word "create" means something out of nothing, ex nihilo. It also is the translation of "bara" which is used only where God is the acting one. Flat creation, creation

as the result of decree, order, and command by authoritative sanction, is what the Bible teaches about creation.

Either God (Spirit) or matter is eternal. If both are eternal, God cannot be assumed to be greater of the two. If the world was made from something already existent, from whence did the already-existing matter come? Who or what, brought it into being? Scientists have already proven by things they can demonstrate that matter is not eternal. To contend that both God and matter are eternal is to dodge an answer and offer a self-contradictory hypothesis. If God made the world from matter that already existed, you still face the problem of origin, the origin of the already-existent matter. Therefore, the argument for the eternal nature of matter fails to answer.

Romans 4:17, *"God... calleth those things which be not as though they were."* Hebrews 11:3, *"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."* The Bible denies the eternal nature of matter.

God is the Cause

God voluntarily created the world and He exists absolutely independently of and before the existence of this world. He is the Cause of this world's existence. Genesis 1:1 shows God clearly distinguished from the heaven and earth which He created. Psalm 33:6, *"By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth."* Second Peter 3:5, *"For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old..."* John 1:1-3, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made."* Isaiah 45:18, *"For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it, he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited; I am the Lord, and there is none else."*

All of the details of "how" God did this, other than He spoke and it was so and it was good, are not revealed. We can add to the many speculations and this would be of no profit. But from nothing God produced this world. Is this reasonable? Is it credible? We answer "yes" to both questions and proceed to show why.

Cause and Effect

The law of cause and effect is accepted by all reasonable people. That the world exists cannot be sensibly denied. The world therefore had a cause. Genesis records God as that First Cause. Science proceeds in all of its investigations on the validity of the law of cause and effect, having proved and demonstrated it over and over. Science relies on its validity. The law is reasonable regarding the origin of the world.

The First Cause was either mind or matter. The universe consists of both mind and matter. Did mind produce matter as the Bible says? Or did matter produce mind? Science itself has shown that matter is not eternal through laws called the laws of thermodynamics, contending that the earth is "running down, wearing out." If it was eternal it would already be gone. Furthermore, things of matters left to themselves go from order to disorder, the very opposite of what evolution and other hypothetical arguments demand.

Mind or Matter?

Additionally, science itself shows that matter does not produce mind. Does the nest create the bird or vice versa? Does the automobile bring into existence the driver? Does the telescope create the astronomer? Life does not originate from dead matter. What if scientists created life in the laboratory, which they have not done? It would only prove the necessity of the action of disciplined and controlled mind to produce it. Once we heard a noted commentator over television declare that scientists had created life in the laboratory. Actually, as the report revealed, they had simply combined some non-living material with living material and the result lived. But that is not startling. This is what happens every time I eat a good biscuit. Production of life in the

laboratory would only affirm what Bible believers have said. It came not into existence by accident but from the operation of mind.

Design

It is futile to deny the design, orderliness, and systems of this world. Design demands a designer, a mind. Hebrews 3:4, *"Every house is building by some man, but he that built all things is God."* To contend that a house just happened would be cause to consider the contender's sanity as having forsaken him.

Morals

Existence of morality proves mind before matter. Matter has no conscience, no "oughtness," no morals, nor can matter produce such. There is no moral standard by which rocks and trees are to be governed. The existence of a moral code demands the previous existence of mind that produced the code.

The purpose of the Genesis record is to show man that the world which exists does so by the creativity of God, and that God alone is the Creator. God, thereby, reveals His existence to mankind and His eternal nature (Romans 1:20). He reveals to man man's dignity inasmuch as man is created in the spiritual image of God. The Bible is not intended to teach science, even though scientifically it is accurate in those things which it reveals. If the Genesis record is false, the Bible is false, with all of the dire consequences to man, and this would create a total void of any genuine and dependable authority for mankind whatever anywhere.

Six Days

Creation was accomplished in six days (Exodus 20:11; Genesis 1). These days had an evening and morning just as do our days. The word "day" comes from the word "yom" meaning what we call a solar or twenty-four hour day when it is used with a numeral. In the Biblical record it is used with a numeral regarding creation. There is no reason to think otherwise, either from the findings of science or the language of the Bible. The idea

that days might mean long periods of time was born of the desire to accommodate the evolutionary hypothesis. If long periods of time are meant it would make the Genesis record scientifically impossible. The eons of darkness would destroy the very life that was supposed to be evolving. It would place the life of Adam into the millions of years.

Furthermore, the geological conditions of our world do not demand long periods of time. We must remember that there is a difference between actual and apparent age. Even the cosmetic industry will insist on this. Adam was created full grown. So was the world where God placed him. The actual age of the earth is not revealed. But there is no condition or finding that cannot be explained within the framework of the miracle of creation and the flood at the time of Noah. Believers need not compromise one Biblical revelation with the skeptical and blasphemous "scientists" who are more a determined atheistic, evolutionist, and humanistic horde than honest people of science, who would deny everything that gives dignity to man.

Accuracy

Christ and Paul received Genesis and its record as accurate, actual, historical, and literal. If they were wrong, Christ is not Deity and Paul was a liar rather than an inspired revealer of truth. The Bible would be a gross fraudulent hoax. One either accepts Genesis or he rejects the entire Scripture. There is no middle ground.

With the creation God fixed certain laws of procreation and reproduction. Each was to reproduce after its own kind. Scientists have proved repeatedly that this is the way things still are. There is no scientific evidence of organic evolution, Darwinian evolution, atheistic, theistic, or agnostic. Any accommodation with such false teaching is to accommodate that which unbelievers have created in their attempt to replace the wisdom of God with their own. Of course, this has been a smear on the history of man since the Garden of Eden, and it is still a rampant, arrogant, dishonest effort even now through the claims of "superiors" that they know more than God could ever have thought.

Purpose

To deny God and His creation record forces us to ask, "What would then be the meaning of man's existence?" If we came as the result of some materialistic accident, came from nowhere for no reason and going nowhere but to the grave, why life itself? What despair and uselessness the theories of men impose upon mankind! They would destroy every evidence of the dignity of mankind. He is reduced to just another meaningless animal among animals in a no-reason existence. If that were so, and thank God it is not, there would be no reason to behave in any certain way. There would be no morality, no law, no purpose, nothing. Of course, this is what indulgent people really want. But with the growth of this idea in the minds of people we are seeing the corresponding results of accepting just such a philosophy. Without God there is nothing but hopelessness and destruction into nothingness. Wherein would there be any motivation for doing anything good? Indeed, who could say what was and was not good anyway?

Man's problem through the ages has been his attempt to relieve himself from accountability to God. In order to do this, he must deny the existence of God. Therefore, he concocts and propagates explanations for the existence of the world other than the reality of God. People make fools of themselves to pursue this path, but such has been and presently is the theme of what some call "education" (Romans 1:22).

To believe God and the Biblical record, and accept the proven scientific evidence, we see purpose, reason, hope, dignity, happiness, oughtness, morality, and future. Fundamental to the religion of Christ is, *"In the beginning God created the heaven and earth... For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day."*

This same God sent His Son to save mankind from sin. Man's very spiritual salvation is inseparably tied to the record of origins as God has reveled it.

* * * * *

REALLY?

I learned a long time ago not to believe everything I heard or read. But some things create more skepticism than others.

Did the story of the incarnation really begin in "sexual scandal"? That is what Andre Resner of Abilene Christian University said in an article published in WINESKINS, a paper produced by Rubel Shelly.

Is the story of the incarnation really a "scandalous story" as Resner said?

Because Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba had a stained morality, does this really imply Mary was of the same sort, as Resner implies?

Was Ruth really an immoral person with Boaz as Resner and the WINESKINS crowd has imagined?

Do you really think Mary was "another sexually questionable woman" as they say?

Was the story of the birth of Christ really "the most embarrassing scandal" of all? These great "scholars" suggest it.

Was the Holy Spirit's account through Matthew really just a "covert statement" to set us up for the "predicament" of Joseph and Mary? Where did this man learn that?

Really, was Joseph's dream just "his subconscious" running wild, trying to find some justification for the outlandish excuses

being offered for Mary being with child? It must be so because these "wise men" have declared it. Who would dare question a liberal?

Was Joseph's dream just his "imagination" rather than a message from God through His angel as the Bible teaches? Are we too bold to even question what these heretics have presented?

Did Mary just use Joseph to "cover her shame?" He said so.

Seeing the other immoral episodes that took place in the past, did Christ really "come from a similar situation"? Resner and the WINESKINS element have printed it, and stand behind it, just as the president of ACU does. Harold Hazelip, president of David Lipscomb University ought be proud to have such a one as this publisher to speak for him.

No, I really did not make any of this up. I really did not invent these scandalous, blasphemous, sacrilegious ideas. They were brazenly, arrogantly, defiantly put forth in the literary instrument of apostasy, WINESKINS, by one who "teaches" Bible at ACU. And for all this vicious diatribe against God's truth and His Son, some still see no danger in the Nashville JUBILEE which this Shelly promotes. How base and flagrant against things holy and sacred will this gang of liberals go before some naive and gullible brethren open their eyes to the truth regarding them and what they are doing? JWB

Attend Good Lectureships

I speak not of attending the assemblies of worship just now. We should always be faithful in this privilege and responsibility. I am suggesting you take advantage of the good lectureships that brethren are presenting. Many churches are doing this all over the country. Some of the finest periods of worship, and rich Bible studies you could ever experience are offered to those who are present.

The Last Word

I try to attend as many of these events as my time away from home and distance will allow. In addition to the benefits already named, it is one of the most inspiring and encouraging times to be with faithful brethren, sound people, those of kindred spirit, who are also of the one faith, who are aware of the onslaughts of liberals against God's truth. These brethren love the souls of man far and near, and are spreading God's truth, and standing firm. What a glorious blessing to attend these marvelous lectures where truth is upheld! Do yourself a favor and attend as many as you can. You will know for yourself!

* * * * *

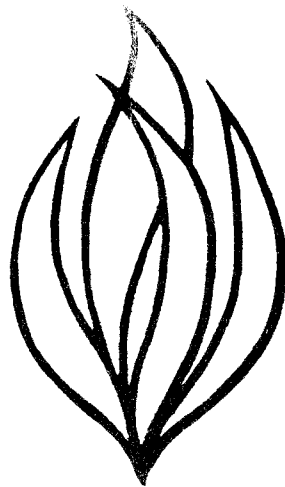
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*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*

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James Teaches About Prayer

What passages in the Bible teach us the most about prayer? Most every Bible student would include what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, that which has been called the model prayer (Matthew 6:9-13). It contains less than seventy words and is therefore noted for its brevity. It is model in scope, covering a wide range of matters both physical and spiritual. Its simplicity is noticeable and it is easily understood. One is impressed with its directness, the way specific things are stated rather than cloaked in vagueness. It is directed to God the Father as the giver of good gifts and offered for His praise and adoration.

Others might mention the prayer prayed by Jesus recorded in John seventeen. This was the prayer where He prayed for unity, God's providence, and protection, for Himself, and His disciples both then and now.

Other great inspired commentaries on prayer were written by Paul. His comments were very short and precise, but at the same time broadly inclusive, such as First Thessalonians 5:17,18, "*Pray without ceasing... Brethren, pray for us.*"

What James Wrote

But there is also the last chapter of James. James 5:13-18, "*Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing psalms. 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. Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.*"

And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." This passage teaches us several important matters concerning prayer.

The phrase, "*Let him pray,*" suggests individual prayer. "*Let him call for the elders... let them pray,*" suggests collective and united prayer. "*The prayer of faith,*" means a believing prayer. "*Pray for one another,*" teaches intercessory prayer. "*The effectual fervent prayer,*" shows the need that prayer be fervent and sincere. "*And he prayed again,*" denotes the propriety of repetitious and continuing prayer, although not with vain repetitions as to think one is heard simply because of his much speaking (Matthew 6:7). "*Prayed that it might not rain,*" shows the specific nature of prayer, not just a general prayer. Let us focus more closely on verse sixteen for there we learn much more about prayer.

Confess Faults

"*Confess your faults,*" is the way the verse begins. The attitude in prayer is important. One must have a willingness to confess his sins because this shows an attitude of humility, a recognition of need, a dependence on God, and the absence of self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, pride, and arrogance. Prayer itself is bowing before another, a submission to one who is considered greater than the one praying. We recall the teaching of Jesus, Luke 19:9-14, "*And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others; Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.*" One man was proud and thought he lacked nothing. The other was humble, confessed his sins, and displayed a genuine attitude of dependence on God.

One Another

We are to confess sins "*one to another.*" We not only humble ourselves before God but before each other in so doing. This confession is not made before some appointed priest of a human religion, nor before some "senior prayer partner" who sits in a superior rank above the one who is confessing. Such is foreign to the truth and the spirit of the teaching as well as the letter. There is no more reason one should confess to another than for the other to confess to the one.

We make a serious mistake to think that only other people commit wrongs and need forgiveness. A willingness to admit fault is a cleansing attitude. We may not be guilty of the same sins but none are sinlessly perfect. We should always be examining ourselves and looking toward self when we come to the matter of confessing sins (Galatians 6:1).

"Pray for one another," is the recognition of equality of saints before God. Each has an access to the Father that can be used on behalf of others. This demonstrates love, concern, spiritual, and physical interest in the welfare of each other. Paul repeatedly asked his brethren to pray for him even as he said he did not cease to remember his brethren in prayer. We all stand in the need of prayer regardless of our rank in this world among men pertaining to the affairs of men.

There is a story about Abraham Lincoln when visitors were going through the White House. He spotted a minister of former acquaintance and took him aside into a private room and asked that he word a prayer on behalf of them both. We appreciate being remembered in prayer when we are sick, or are traveling, or undertaking some task, possibly facing some difficulty. Gospel preachers are often encouraged because they are remembered in the prayers of their brethren. One of the most loving moments of a congregation is when they bow their heads in prayer and pray especially on behalf of certain brethren, whatever might be the reason for the prayer. It is not trivial but genuine love that causes brethren to often name others in their prayers.

Being Specific

Similar to the model prayer of Jesus in Matthew six, James shows prayer is to be specific. He mentioned Elijah who specifically prayed that it might not rain, and then later specifically prayed that it would rain. Notice the specific nature of prayer when James taught brethren to pray for the sick that they might be healed. We must take notice that James taught in the days of miracles. It is implied that the elders who were called had miraculous power to heal, for such power was granted to many by the apostles laying hands upon them and imparting such power. God healed through the apostles. He then healed miraculously. God still heals, Now He heals through the means that He has provided, such as medicines, doctors, nurses, etc.

Anoint With Oil?

The anointing of oil has been the cause of confusion for many. To anoint one with oil could and did have certain medicinal benefits as is evidenced in the actions of the Good Samaritan when he found the victim alongside the Jerusalem to Jericho road, and he poured oil and wine on the victim's wounds. Again, anointing with oil was a symbol of designation to denote the recipient of some benefit or blessing, or a symbol of appointment to some task, such as becoming king or a prophet. Again, this was done in the context of the miraculous age and should not be incorporated as a religious rite among brethren today.

Possibly it is more appropriate that our private prayers be more specific than public prayers because there are personal matters about which we pray that does not include, and even should not be brought to the attention of everyone publicly. But even in our public prayers we can include specific matters that pertain to all those involved in the act of praying. It is not that we suggest forbidding prayers be personal, but that when one prays in leading the thoughts of prayers for many brethren, he should speak of those things pertaining to the entire congregation. He has the power of prayer and his own private prayers would be the better place to include the more private and personal matters.

Sincerity

Sincerity in prayer is essential. A prayer is productive when fervently prayed. Again, attitude is involved. The state of heart and the relationship with God is important. We do not pray to "claim" God's blessings as if God owed us anything and we have come forward to "claim" them. We have heard people pray, especially on television, and word their prayers almost as if they were demanding God to make good on His promises, shouting at God, "We claim this or that because you have promised it." But we pray with request, asking, entreating, appealing. Nothing is more hypocritical than to pray, not believing, not really meaning what we pray.

What of Your Life?

Another condition of heart for acceptable prayer and for prayer to be heard and answered is one's quality of life. This does not mean that we can so live as to deserve to be heard and God owes us in payment for a good life. But Proverbs 28:9 warns, "*He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.*" One cannot disregard God's law, live in whatever way he wishes, and still expect God to hear and answer his prayer. "*The prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*" Some folks may live so that they are not on speaking terms with God.

Tennyson wrote, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." This is true concerning the prayers of those who are faithful children of God. God's children have the privilege of calling on their Father. They also have the duty of prayer. There is great power at our disposal and use to attract the attention of Almighty God and be assured that He will hear and respond to our prayers according to His will. Not all who pray have that assurance. Only those in Christ have the promise that God offers in the matter of hearing and answering prayer.

God's Will First

A righteous man will always pray that God's will be done rather than his own. This is in the imitation of

Christ (Matthew 26:29). When we call upon the infinite God the right way, out of the right mind, we have His assurance that blessings will follow. Make this blessing your own by becoming His child.

* * * * *

God's Tool

There are many Christians who are active and working diligently in being what God wants all people to be. They are righteous and busy in doing His will in their lives. There are also others who profess to be Christians but who appear to be sitting idly by, not really participating in the work of the Lord, doing very little if anything to expand the influence and cause of Christ in this world. What makes the difference?

We would like to believe that every Christian would prefer to be useful in the Lord's kingdom. We are sure this is what God would have us to do. Assuming there is the desire to be useful, there must be something other than desire to work that causes some to be at work and others to be relatively inactive. We often pray, "Use us as tools in Thy hand to do Thy will in this life." What kind of Christian can and does God use?

We have examples in both the Old and New Testaments of people who were tools in God's hands. In Acts six we read of the Grecian widows who were had been neglected. This neglect was brought to the attention of the apostles. Acts 6:1-4, *"And in those days, when the number of disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitudes of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."*

They Were Tools

Having received this direction, and the list of qualifications which should belong to those they would choose, men who were of good judgment, wise, spiritually minded, of good reputation, seven were selected and appointed by the apostles. They became tools in God's hands to accomplish a needed work.

We also read of the story of the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. Ananias was sent to him to tell him what to do. At first Ananias hesitated to go because of the reputation of Saul as a persecutor of Christians. But he went after he was told that Paul was a "*chosen vessel*" of the Lord (Acts 9:15). Why was Saul chosen? Was it not because he had shown himself to be honest, zealous, dedicated, knowledgeable, aggressive, and a man of conviction that stood out from among his peers? He was one that could be used as a tool in God's hand.

Early in the personal ministry of Christ He chose the twelve apostles. Generally speaking they were active men, workers, men of integrity, capable of assuming and discharging responsibilities, humble, teachable, with certain natural abilities, having developed qualities of life that gave them tremendous potential to accomplish the work the Lord had for them to do. They became tools in the hands of God.

Their Qualifications

From the accounts of Bible people that God could and did use in His service, we can list a number of outstanding qualities. As we proceed to note these qualities we might ask ourselves how we qualify. The Lord uses the talented. A talent is difficult to define. We all have talents in varying ways. But it could refer to natural abilities that have been developed or could be developed. Some are seemingly born with certain potentials that may not be possessed by others. This does not make the talented more precious in the sight of the Lord. It does mean they can do more than some others and are therefore expected to do more than others. But whatever talents one might have he must cultivate them, use them, or they will not produce and will soon be lost.

In the parable of the talents we find application here. In the parable the talent was money but the principle could apply to whatever ability and opportunity one might have. In Matthew twenty-five we read of the five talents one had, two talents of another, and but a single talent of a third. The first two were commended because they went out and used what they had and doubled their substance. The man with one talent was not approved, but severely rebuked. It was not because he did not double what he had. It was because he failed to use what he did have. He was too fearful to act. He buried his talent. What a waste! While we all do not have the same talents, we all have talents and are expected to use what we have. The greater our talents the more God expects (Luke 12:48).

The Usefulness of Training

The Lord uses the trained, those who will equip themselves to do a better job. Again, we refer to Saul of Tarsus. He had studied at the feet of Gamaliel and had knowledge of God's word as well as the world around him. He knew languages and was noted for being a learned man. All of the apostles were trained for their task for over three years at the feet of Jesus. While it is a danger and a mistaken idea that only those who have been professionally trained can do the Lord's work, it is true that God can use those who receive training. Being a Christian is "on the job training." The more we do in His service the better equipped we are to be an effective and efficient servant. Moses spent two thirds of his life getting ready to do the major task that God had for him to do. His final forty years was spent leading Israel from Egypt toward the promised land. He had been trained in Egypt and in the wilderness as a shepherd. At eighty he was ready and served well.

The Young Can Serve

The Lord can use the young. It is not necessary to wait in order to service. To be sure there are works and tasks that are not to be left to the young, but this does not mean there are no works for them to do. Paul saw the quality of Timothy (Acts 16:1-3), and had him go with him to the work. Joseph, Samuel, David, Josiah, Daniel,

John Mark are all good examples of youth at work for the Lord. First Timothy 4:12, "*Let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.*"

Notice the closing phrase of the previous passage. The Lord uses the pure. It was said of Nathanael, "*Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.*" (John 1:47). An elder is to be "*without reproach*" (First Timothy 3:2). "*Keep thyself pure,*" (First Timothy 5:22). One who lives in service to the devil in his life cannot be a tool in the hand of God. While evil in one's past can be forgiven, evil in one's present prohibits him from doing the work he should do. One can renounce the sins of the past, repent of them, reform his life. But if one continues to walk in darkness he cannot be in fellowship with the Lord (First John 1:7).

The Lord can use those who are dedicated, steadfast, and will not compromise. He uses people who have the courage, strength, and stamina like John the Baptist.

Not All Can Be Used

The Lord cannot use those who are proud because the proud get themselves in the way of rendering service. He uses the humble. Denying self is a qualification for being a disciple of Christ (Matthew 16:24). The emphasis our Lord placed on greatness was measured in terms of service rendered.

Some may be like Naaman who was wanting only to do what he wanted to do, or "*some great thing.*" Some show signs of seeking their own glory, honor, gain, fame, and prestige. To be honorable one must work without the praises of men. Those who seek men's praise may get that, but that is all they get. Seeking the recognition of the world, even of brethren, is not being a useful servant of the Lord (Matthew 6:1-4).

The Quiet and Unnoticed Servant

Very likely the most profitable service to the cause of Christ may be rendered by one who is seldom noted, but who goes about his or her daily duties without fanfare,

living righteously, earning a livelihood, paying bills, rearing children in the way of the Lord, caring for those in need, speaking kindly and lovingly to others, refraining from partaking of the evil of this world, praying, worshipping, reflecting in a humble and quiet way the spirit of Christ.

We Must Be Willing

But the Lord can only use those who are willing to be used as tools in His hands. Being a Christian is to be a volunteer. One becomes a Christian upon making a deliberate decision to be a Christian and obeying the commands Jesus has given to enter His fold. In John 6:66 some who followed Jesus heard Him and turned and walked with Him no more because they were unwilling to accept His teaching or conform their own lives to His will. When the apostles were called they left all and followed Him. One may have many talents, great training, many other assets that are worthy and notable, but if he or she is unwilling to be of service to the Lord they cannot be used by the Lord.

What of You and Me?

Does God use you and me? Can He use you and me? Are we trying to make ourselves people God can use? It is significant that most qualities necessary for being a useful tool in the hands of God are qualities that we can develop if we set our minds to the development of them. Talent may be natural ability, but it may be latent and must be nurtured. Training, humility, dedication, loyalty, purity, willingness are characteristics we can possess if we are determined to possess them. There is really no excuse for not being useful to Christ.

We may not serve the Lord in the same capacities as others, but that is not that is most important. God expects each one to serve the way He has authorized and in the way we are capable. But He does expect that. As was said of the good woman, "*She hath done what she could.*"

Let each of us take inventory of ourselves and our work as Christians. Let each ask, "What am I doing? Am I

doing what I can and ought?" It may be wonderful to work with others and work with some organized program of work. Such programs are usually offered in most faithful congregations and we are urged and solicited to be participants and cooperate. But we are not confined to only that way of serving. There is labor that each can do and accomplish without having it to be some organized program promoted by church leaders. There is that personal, individual, sacrificial manifestation of love in service that is open to everyone.

It ought to be our prayer, "Lord, use me as a tool in Thy hands. Make me useful and may I diligently strive to make myself as useful as I can be."

* * * * *

Know Thyself

LESSON ONE

Psalm 8, "O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger. When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet; and sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!"

Man, meaning the human race, is here. We exist. We are creatures of reality. But what are we? We wish to present a lesson answering the inquiry of the psalmist, "What is man?"

What is Man?

There have been many philosophies put forth through the ages of history to answer this question. Man has been described so many ways, and analogies have been drawn. We are concerned with the Biblical doctrine of man in order that we might have a healthy and correct respect for ourselves and others. This is possible only as we understand the relationship between God and man.

Man is either a product of creation or in some manner has evolved into what he is from something else. Either man began as man or he became a man somewhere along the way. It has to be one way or the other. He either was born a man, originally made a man, or was transformed into a man. Which is it?

The Biblical doctrine on this point is quite clear. Genesis 1:26, *"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness... God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."* Genesis 2:7, *"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."*

Similarly for the woman, Genesis 2:18, *"And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him."* Genesis 2:21-23, *"And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man."* These accounts were endorsed by Jesus (Matthew 19:5), and the inspired apostle Paul (Acts 17:24-28).

An Unsupported Hypothesis

Organic evolution is not supported either by science or Scripture. There is no process or mechanism known to science by which a single cell has developed into the highly complex creature like man with many cells. The

evidence for evolution exists nowhere but in the imaginations of those who stoutly refuse to accept God's word, but trust in the words such unbelievers have put on paper. No branch of science affords evidence that evolution (Darwinian evolution) is a proven fact in spite of the lies put forth by some who seem to think that if they shout a lie long enough that eventually everyone will accept it as the truth. The Biblical doctrine harmonizes with every known and demonstrable fact. Man is a being created by God.

Man's Uniqueness

Man is a rational being. The Bible shows man as having ability to think, reason, perceive, understand, plan, purpose, will, determine, analyze, hope, and remember. These are all qualities of mind. Significantly, God, through His word, speaks to the mind of man. God obligates man to study His word, learn it, live it, teach it, and defend it. There is no other creature of the creation of God upon whom God imposes this responsibility. This is because man is unique and distinctive from all other creatures. Furthermore, only to man does God give the power and privilege of prayer.

God created man as a free moral being, a creature of choice and volition. Genesis three records the entrance of sin into the world. Why did God make man capable of sinning? The answer lies in the question itself. God made a man, not a robot or a machine. Man can choose what he will and will not do. Unless he could do this he would not be man. Man sinned by choice. He is capable of deciding his course. Man is a moral creature with capacity to be concerned about right and wrong. God does not force men to follow Him, nor force men to come to Him for salvation. He does not even force men to love Him against their will. God does not govern man in violation of the quality He placed in man.

A False Doctrine

Calvinism teaches that God predetermined everything about everybody before they were even in existence. If this is true, and it most assuredly is not, it would mean that man is just a programmed machine carrying out

what has already been determined for him. Everything man said or did would actually be meaningless. It would mean that man is not responsible for his behavior or for himself. He could not change what he did even if he thought he wanted to do so. It would mean he could not alter his destiny to be saved or lost. His entire existence would simply be fate, "whatever will be, will be."

Note the following passages that show this doctrine to be false and that man does have deciding power, therefore, accountable. John 7:17, 37, *"If a man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself... In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink."* Matthew 11:28-30, *"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."* Hebrews 5:9, *"And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."* Revelation 22:17, *"And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst, Come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."* Each of these passages imply a capacity in man to exercise his own will and make choices, which would not be true if man is as the Calvinistic doctrine falsely contends.

The Conscience of Man

The created, rational man who is a free moral being has a conscience. In this he is clearly distinguished from all other forms of life, animal and vegetable. Acts 23:1, *"And Paul earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."* Roman 9:1, *"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost."* Second Timothy 1:3, *"I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day."* Consider closely what is affirmed in Romans 2:15. *"Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one*

another." There is the conscience. Man has a conscience. The conscience is a witness bearer. It can commend, excuse, condemn or accuse.

The conscience urges man to do what he judges he ought to do or to refrain from doing what he determines he ought not do. The conscience does not assure him that he has judged and determined correctly. To so think is one of mankind's fundamental errors. Some say, "Let your conscience be your guide," as if whatever your conscience guides you to do is necessarily right before God. That is not so.

Things to Consider

There are a number of factors involved regarding a course of action under consideration. The accuracy of information is all important in the proper working of the conscience. If information is in error, or incomplete, then judgments made on that information may well and likely will prove to be faulty. Conscience only operates on whatever information the heart or mind of man receives. Conscience does not assure the accuracy of information.

Conscience is involved in making judgments, not only on the information received, but also against the background of training a person has received regarding what is right and wrong. Man decides on the basis of what he has been taught. The conscience serves as a prompter to make judgments according to one's training, but it is not an assurance that the training that he has received is correct.

The conscience is involved when man acts. If one acts in harmony with, or possibly contrary to, the judgments made as his conscience dictates, then his conscience will either commend him (when he acts in harmony with his conscience), or condemn him (when he acts contrary to his conscience). His conscience will determine whether he feels good about that he does or badly about what he does. But how he feels does not determine whether he has actually acted according to the will of God or not. His feelings are determined by whether he has acted harmoniously with his conscience and nothing more.

Consciences have to be trained properly before they can be a reliable guide.

Good Conscience, but Evil

It is possible for one to have a good conscience even while doing evil. Saul persecuted Christians but never did he violate his conscience. When one does as he has been taught to be right, whatever he does will not violate his conscience because it is in keeping with his training. It is even possible to have a pained and grieved conscience while doing what is actually right. If one has been taught something is wrong when actually it is right in itself, then his conscience will pain him when he does it even though what he does is not actually wrong in itself. It just depends on the way the conscience has been trained and the correctness of the information received. For these reasons the conscience, while a guide, cannot be considered an infallible guide. For the conscience to be reliable it must be trained in harmony with the word of God. Only God's will is the ultimate and infallible standard and measure.

Continued action in violation of the guidance of the conscience can make one's conscience "seared." It soon loses its sensitivity to its training. It is actually retrained. First Timothy 4:2, Paul speaks of men that speak lies, "...*having their consciences seared with a hot iron.*" They had lied so much and so often that even though it may have been painful to their consciences at the first, they continued lying until their lying no longer offended their consciences.

Listen to Your Conscience

It is sinful to violate the conscience. Romans 14:22,23, "*Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; and whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*" The word "faith" has the meaning of one's personal conviction in this passage. It refers to what one thinks to be right or wrong about a matter. To eat flesh, the subject of Romans fourteen, thinking it to be wrong, even though Paul makes it clear it is not wrong in itself,

is to run against the guidance of one's conscience and conviction, and Paul says even that is also sin. One cannot be honest and do what he thinks is wrong. Even if he does it doubting that it is right, he does sin.

Conscience is an aid to man if his conscience has been molded to react harmoniously with God's word. When the conscience is ignored it is corrupting to a person. So the old adage to let your conscience be your guide has only limited merit. But the Bible teaches this unique quality of man, that he does have a conscience.

What is man? Thus far we have learned that man is a created being, a rational being, a free moral agent with the power of choice and accountability, a being with a conscience. Other qualities are presented in the next lesson to help us know ourselves, what we are, who we are, and our relationship with God.

* * * * *

Know Thyself

LESSON TWO

Psalm eight includes the question, "*What is man?*" We are reaching for the Biblical doctrine of man. This is an essential point to understand if we are to have a healthy respect for ourselves and others as well as comprehend our relationship to God. What we think of ourselves will affect how we conduct our lives, determine our values, and will contribute to the eternal destiny of the soul. In our first lesson we learned that man is a created, rational, free moral being with conscience that can commend or condemn, depending on its training. We saw the importance of training our conscience in keeping with the Word of God.

We Are Physical

Now we learn that man, in this life on earth, dwells in a physical body. The Biblical doctrine of man makes it

clear that there is a distinction between the real individual and the place where the real individual lives. Second Corinthians 5:1, "*For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*" A tabernacle is a tent, a temporary dwelling. When physical death overtakes a human being he leaves this tent of a physical body for a spirit "*house not made with hands.*" The existence of that house gives us courage, hope, purpose, and meaning to life because it is a house that is not temporary but eternal.

Second Corinthians 5:6-8, "*Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord; (For we walk by faith, not by sight). We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.*" Our earthly life is lived in this fleshly body, but while we live we are absent from the place where the Lord will dwell with us eternally. When we leave this fleshly tabernacle we go to be with God. The "*house not made with hands*" refers to being in the eternal presence of God.

Second Peter 1:13,14, "*Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance, knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me.*" The real Peter is distinguished from the body in which Peter lived. At death, and this is that to which he refers, he would leave this tabernacle, or body.

Acts 9:36-39 tells of the death of Dorcas. When Peter came to her side and was shown the coats and garments she had made, even though her body was in their presence, Dorcas was not. It tells of the things Dorcas had done "*while she was with them.*" It is a comforting thought to know that what we commit into the grave is not actually our loved one but only the body in which they lived before they went to be with the Lord. The real person has already departed for home before the burial.

James 2:26 teaches that death is the separation of the body and spirit. Ecclesiastes 12:7 also shows how the body is to return to the dust from which it was made, but

the spirit into the care of God. So we cannot escape the fact that the Bible teaches man is body and soul. He is flesh, but also spirit.

More Than Physical

While man is mortal as far as the physical body is concerned, the real man lives and does not cease to exist. Matthew 25:46 contains the climax of the teaching of Jesus and the judgment scene He had just presented. After the judgment the wicked enter into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. In both instances, both with the saved as with the lost, man enters a domain that shall never end.

The immortal nature of the spirit of man is emphasized in the following passages. Second Corinthians 5:1, which we have already cited, noting a building from God, a house not made with hands, *"eternal"* in the heavens. Philippians 1:23, *"But I am in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart and to be with Christ, for it is very far better."*

Philippians 3:21, *"Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."* Jesus has the power and will use His power to fashion anew the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory. First John 3:2, *"Beloved, now we are children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested we shall be like him, for we shall see him even as he is."* Just what all this passage might include I would be hesitant to say with dogmatism. But one thing for sure it does teach, and that is that man does not cease to exist at physical death, but has a spirit that survives and the spirit of the redeemed shall be glorified even as Christ was glorified.

John 11:25,26, *"Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die."* Note that those of Christ shall *"never"* die. Obviously this does not mean they shall not experience physical death, but that they will not cease to

be existent though overtaken by physical death, but shall live with Him.

Second Timothy 1:10, Paul referred to Jesus, *"...who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel."* Until the cross of Christ, death and Satan had dominion over mankind. But that is no longer the case because Christ conquered death and overcame the forces of evil to establish the way of eternal life for man, bringing into certain reality the immortal nature of God's creature, the human being.

First Thessalonians 4:17, when Paul was comforting his brethren concerning those who had died prior to the return of Christ, he told them how when Christ does return, *"... then we that are alive, that are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord."* This certainly does not imply a cessation of man's existence, but states his immortality, his never ending existence. The immortal nature of man is unquestionably affirmed by the inspired Scriptures.

We Shall Give Answer

Man is amenable, accountable, and responsible before God and to God. God commands men to repent because, Acts 17:31, *".... he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world by that man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."* The command to repent presupposes the reality and existence of sin, the transgression of God's law (First John 3:4), because there is no sin where there is no law (Romans 4:15). The reality of sin means the reality of law, which means the accountability of man to obey God's law. Such is also evident from Second Corinthians 5:10, *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."*

A Universal Doctrine

There is one body of doctrine applicable to all mankind today. That is the gospel, the one faith (Ephesians 4:5),

and it is to be preached to every creature (Mark 16:15) because all men need the salvation offered in the gospel, and all men are amenable to God's gospel law. Although man may be unaware that he is to give answer ultimately to God, or man may choose to disregard that fact of the future, that does not change the fact of accountability to God's will that abides with all mankind.

Some of the words in the Old and New Testament give us a picture of the various parts that make up man. Man is flesh. All flesh is not the same flesh (First Corinthians 15:39). Mankind is of the same flesh (Genesis 2:23). This is that part of mankind that shall return to the dust (Ecclesiastes 12:7). This is the mortal side of man; his material nature.

Spirit, Soul, Heart

Man is also spirit, referring to that part of man that does not cease to exist at physical death, that part of man that is made in the spiritual likeness or image of God (Genesis 1:27). This is that part of man that leaves the body, the tabernacle, at physical death (James 2:26). This is the part of man of which God is the Father (Hebrews 12:9) and underscores man's spiritual realm, value, and immortality.

There is also the word "*soul*" as well as the words "*body and spirit*." "*Soul*" is used in several distinct ways in Scripture, each determined by its context. Sometimes it refers to that which is synonymous with man's "*spirit*." Sometimes it is that quality called life that is also extant in animals (Genesis 2:7). Scripture sometimes speaks of both "*body and soul*" (Matthew 10:28), and presents man as a dual being. Scripture also uses the word "*soul*" to refer to a person in his or her entirety, such as in Acts two where it is said that three thousand souls were baptized on that day of Pentecost.

But there are also times when Scripture speaks of man as a three-fold being, having body, soul, and spirit, with obvious difference between soul and spirit, such as in First Thessalonians 5:23 and Hebrews 4:12. In such cases the body surely refers to the flesh, the soul refers

to the animalistic life of man, and spirit refers to the inward man, that part of man that is in the likeness of God's spiritual image.

But we also find the word "*heart*" when describing mankind. This has no reference to the physical blood pump within the chest cavity of the body of the person (although there are times when "*heart*" does refer to the bodily organ, determined by context). "*Heart*" means the fountain or seat of thought, passion, emotion, desire, appetite, affection, as well as that part of man that reasons, judges, understands, decides, with the connotation of man's intellect. As already noted, man has a conscience and this is related to this part of man.

In summary we can say that man has many parts. He has been created by God, he is rational, he is a free moral being, he has a conscience, there is body, soul, spirit, inward and outward man, that part of man that is mortal and decays, and that part of man that is immortal and will exist in eternity. Mankind, therefore, is related to two worlds, the physical and the spiritual, the temporal and the eternal.

When we consider man as the Bible pictures him, we see the reason for contending for the dignity and glory of the human being above every other creature that exists on earth. We see he does have reason to exist. We learn from whence we have come, why we are here, and where we are going. We see the purpose of this life, and the mission we are to accomplish. We understand why humans are to be considered with respect and honor. It is not because of man's own merit, but because he is a creature of God, made very special by God, one who shall give account to God. "*What is man...?*" He is worth more than all this world, even one person. He is so valuable that God sent His Son into the world to save him from that which would destroy his welfare. That in itself should prove to us the greatness and worth of man.

Are not these truths vital to us in order that we might truly know ourselves, and see ourselves as God sees us?

* * * * *

I'll Tell Your Something That Really Does Brighten a Day!

Let a congregation of God's people hear about a need for assistance in some locality where brethren are struggling to have a place to assemble, and let that same congregation put forth a successful effort to raise funds to assist the struggling church, then do we not have cause for rejoicing?

See a brother or sister who has allowed sin to overtake their life, having left the church and turned away from the loving admonitions given them time after time until it seems the fallen one will never be impressed with their guilt and their need for repentance, but one day the sinful brother or sister steps forward to acknowledge their sins and ask God's forgiveness and seeks to return to fellowship with the saints, does not that make a day bright and cheer the heart of every redeemed soul? Surely, it does!

Let a false teacher spew forth his error with all his pomp, pride, and egotism and some good, humble brother who loves the truth stand up and be counted on the side of truth to the discredit of the false teacher, does not this give courage to every faithful soul, and brighten the day? Who could doubt it?

And then to hear of the conversion of souls to Christ where the gospel heretofore had not been preached, is this not an inspiration to know that the gospel is still God's power to save? It brightens even the darkest hour!

When you know of two good brethren who for one reason or another have fallen out with each other, and then with a more rational mind and Christlike spirit resolve their differences and have kindly and brotherly affection toward each other again, it is enough to make the hardest of hearts soft and warm!

And what lifts the soul much more in this day of apostasy and digression to meet people you have known in years gone by, people with whom you have had little contact for a long span of years, and then upon renewal of closer association find out that they are aware of the inroads of error, they are still loyal to the same gospel of Christ for which you once stood together, they have not changed with the currents and tides of departure, but still follow the "old paths!" How reassuring and strengthening it is! What brightness becomes such a time as that!

And when in the midst of sorrow, death, disease, losses of one sort or another, even such as are common to man, and you once again focus your attention on the eternal reward of heaven, plus the assurance that God cares and is with you even as you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, the darkness that might try to surround you is displaced by the effulgence of His glory and your soul rejoices in the brilliance and beauty of the knowledge that you are His child. What a lovely and shining day is that!

May God bless each of us as we serve Him.

JWB

Some Brethren Demand Too Much

Yes, sometimes brethren ask of others far too much, more than they really have the right to ask or expect. If fact, they act in a very faulty manner to ask what some must think they have a special privilege to demand.

The scenario goes like this. One gets angry at another, not over doctrine and God's truth, but for some disagreement between them. Then what happens? Possibly one or both get the idea that everybody else should get angry at the same one with whom they have their problems. They cut and tear, not only at their adversary, but demand everybody side with them against their adversary. **THEY HAVE NO RIGHT TO MAKE SUCH DEMANDS!** They ought to be ashamed to expect it.

What they ought do, rather than making more enemies, is settle their disputes so everybody could be happy.JB

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.

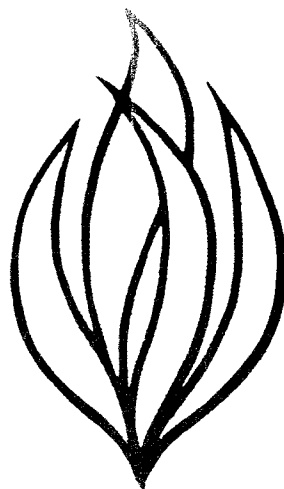
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A Burning Fire



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

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Two Principles For Achieving Unity

Much thought and many words have been offered on the subject of unity, especially on unity in religion. One drawback to the influence of those who profess to follow Christ is the broad and deep division that characterizes what is called "Christianity" by the world. Of course, all that men call the religion of Christ is by no means of Him. But the desirability and power of unity is not questioned. But how do we attain it? Nearly everyone will ultimately answer that we must have a common standard, even if the standard is to allow division to continue and call it "unity in diversity." Most "Christians" say they have allegiance to the Bible, but this obviously is not true. Therefore, the division, confusion, competition, and chaos persists.

Unity is the Lord's will (First Corinthians 1:10-13; John 17:20,21). While some have foolishly gloried in division, even thanking God that He has given us division in order to allow man a choice how man might wish to serve God, no honest person can read the Scriptures and not be impressed that God wants unity among those who claim to belong to Him.

A Good Procedure

We wish to present two very simple but important principles that, if heard and heeded, would assist in attaining religious unity, even the kind and quality of unity that God approves. Let us deal with one thing at a time and make things as sure as they can be made. Look at that last statement again. (1) Deal with one thing at a time, and (2) make things as sure as they can be made. This procedure is useful in settling all difference and closing ranks. We seek unity and the opportunity to nourish it. We could stand together if we would apply these two principles to the division that exists whether we speak of the general religious division among religious people everywhere, or the division that sometimes is forced into the ranks of the body of Christ.

If only we could deal with one thing at a time. We know that there are many matters that are related. But this should not prevent us from considering each difference by itself long enough to find common ground. If what we have learned has to be altered when we see its relationship to other matters, so be it. But if we try to conquer all problems of division with one swoop, we shall likely fail and the differences will seem insurmountable and defy solution. There are so many doctrines, names, beliefs, practices that we cannot resolve all of them in a swift moment or one swipe of the sword. The process of taking one thing at a time may be slow, even tedious at times. But one of the difficulties people have when discussing religion and encountering differences is jumping about from one matter to another, never coming to any solution on anything. This hop, skip, jump type of religious discussion seldom produces any lasting good. It only underscores the width of divisions. This jumping about is often a tactic used by some when they see their position has faults about it. We have experienced this over and over again when discussing the Bible with various religious people. It sometimes is hard to get people to stay on the subject. When they run into a snag in their beliefs their first line of defense is to hurry along to another subject without resolving anything. This will never cure division.

We are told that computers have two possible reactions on any given point, either a yes or a no, a positive or a negative, a plus or a minus. Operating at speeds beyond comprehension, thousands of answers can be given quickly, producing solutions that often seem so complex. Yet, when one understands the operation of computers (and I do not profess this understanding but accept what others who know have told me) he learns that the many calculations the computer makes are actually made one at a time. It is done with such speed it only seems to be a sweeping conclusion.

An Illustration

Let me illustrate this principle with daily life. The next day's duties may seem ever so involved when we sit down and outline what we expect and need to accomplish. Our tasks seem almost beyond us if we

consider them all together. But we become equal to the task when we tackle one thing at a time. Resulting confusion and frustration is commonplace when too much is attempted at once without completion of anything. This principle is operative in deciding religious issues.

Regarding Baptism

For example of how this works, consider the subject of baptism. What is the form of baptism? This is one question among many questions about baptism but one of the simplest to learn. But there is division about it. Is baptism immersion, sprinkling, or pouring, or all three? What does the Scripture teach? The word "baptize" means to plunge beneath or submerge. Baptism is said to be a burial (Colossians 2:12; Romans 6:3,4). Every word picture of baptism in the New Testament shows it to be a burial. Sprinkling and pouring are admittedly introductions and substitutions by men that came many years after the Scriptures were written. The solution is really very simple provided we all accept what the Bible teaches. The problem is not the form of baptism as much as one's willingness to accept what the Bible teaches. Everyone agrees that immersion is baptism. Division arises when some adopt the non-Biblical authorities and follow them. The issue should be put to rest and then turn to another, now standing in unity on this matter. To jump to another point without coming to a knowledge of the truth is fruitless.

Consider another thought pertaining to baptism. What about "infant baptism?" We put "infant baptism" in quotation marks because actually few, if any, baptize (immerse) infants. Those who practice what they call "infant baptism" do not baptize infants but sprinkle or pour water on the infant's head. Such a practice did not find its origin in Scripture. It grew out of the false doctrine that children are born into this world depraved, guilty of the sins of their foreparents. Some who realized baptism was for the remission of sins and believing the children damned hastened to do something for the "depraved" children and started practicing "infant baptism." But such never has been a Biblically authorized practice.

But this matter ought not divide honest people. There is no question what Scripture teaches as to who is a qualified candidate for baptism. Without going into great detail here in this lesson, we can summarize by noting that in the New Testament those who were baptized were those who had been taught, had the capacity to learn and understand, who had faith in Christ, who repented of their sins (implying they were old enough to have transgressed God's law themselves, (First John 3:4), and had the capacity to confess their faith in Christ (obviously having the ability to do this, which infants do not.) They understood they were to be baptized by the authority of Christ for the remission of sins as they were taught. If only we would consent to stay with what the Scripture teaches there would be no division on this matter.

But how often when Scripture is cited, someone who persists in rejecting what the Bible says about baptism suddenly wants to discuss another subject?

We Can Know With Certainty

Our second principle is to make it as sure as you can and this has great merit in producing unity. We can be sure. To say we cannot know and cannot be sure contradicts Christ (John 8:32), and John (First John 2:3). God did not command unity of His people and then prohibit its attainment. We can know the will of God (Ephesians 3:4; 5:17). We can know, for instance, how often to partake of the Lord's Supper because Scripture reveals it was observed every first day of the week. Nobody contends that practice is wrong. We have authority for that. But where is authority for some other day? Which practice is sure and right and one in which we all can have confidence?

Regarding Music in Worship

In the matter of music in Christian worship, none who knows what the New Testament reveals would contend we must have an instrument, even though some of the arguments for it will logically demand it. All agree that singing is acceptable. All agree the early church sang without instruments and were pleasing to God. The

source of division is the addition that some would force upon others. Can we find a way that is sure, that cannot be wrong, where all can stand together and cease the division over the matter? Certainly, we can, if we will simply be willing to abide by the revelation in the Word. Every passage that teaches on the subject teaches the same thing regarding how to make music in worship by the authority of Christ. All teach singing. It is always right to abide in the doctrine of Christ (Second John 9-11). We are not suggesting that people who want the instrument cease using it merely because we can all agree to singing. They should give it up because there is no authority for it. But we can be one in the matter when we are content to accept that of which we can be sure.

Every issue between people may not be so easily resolved as the illustrations used. Even those we have mentioned have not been settled because too many simply reject what Scripture teaches in favor of what they want, what their foreparents did, what their church practices, what their creed call for. It is significant to me that those who stand so adamantly opposed to the churches of Christ will agree that immersion is right, singing is right, etc. but accuse the members of the church of causing division. We stand for the very thing upon which we all can agree is right. How does this cause division? We stand for the revealed truth. It is the innovations of men for which there is no Bible basis that divide, and these things we must oppose if we be faithful to truth, not only because they are wrong and divide, but because they are wrong by lacking authority for them.

His Will First

It would seem that as defeating and destructive as division is, in the light of the Lord's will that there be unity, that men would seek unity on God's terms. It all begins with the attitude toward the authority of the Bible. While some say we should follow the Bible, they also insist that other authorities be given equal billing and be embraced as well. But the Bible forbids other authorities (Second Timothy 3:16,17). The Bible is inspired of God, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, and all-sufficient. If people would subscribe to the authority of the Bible and take one issue at a time, deal with it,

resolve it, and accept what cannot be wrong, giant strides toward unity would be realized. How many times have we received letters and calls from people about various subjects, but when a Biblical answer is given they bring up a multitude of other things without accepting the truth on anything.

But if Scripture is rejected on one issue there is not much use trying to resolve other issues on Scripture because the rejection of Scripture destroys any common ground upon which agreement can be founded. This false doctrine of "unity in diversity" is simply the doctrine to agree to disagree and just call it unity anyway. "Unity in diversity" is not unity but heresy. Those who promote that doctrine do not seek unity, but seek fellowship in spite of division.

We can make things sure without guesswork and speculation if we will. When all will abide by the Biblical prohibition of adding to and taking from God's Word we can obey what He teaches, speaking as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11).

Following these two principles may not resolve all matters, but I find few, if any, that would not be solved. It just depends on whether those who are divided really love the Word enough to let God have his way.

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Solomon's Temple and the Church

We find many Old Testament pictures of New Testament people, doctrine, events, and other type and anti-type relationships. We can even learn in the Old Testament something about the Lord's church that is revealed in the New Testament more completely. Of course, these things show the inseparable tie that exists between the Old Testament and new Testament. This is important

because modernists deny there is any real connection between them. For them to do that would demand they surrender their preconceived bias they have already declared how there can be no such thing as prophesy and its fulfillment for that demands the miraculous, which demands the existence of God and inspiration, something they abhor to consider.

Tabernacle and Temple

Moses built the tabernacle for the Israelites as God gave him the pattern when Israel was encamped around Sinai. Later, after Israel had taken Canaan, the period of Judges had passed, and Israel had become a kingdom, the tabernacle was replaced by the temple, which was called the "*house of God*" and where God did dwell in a very special and distinctive way. The Lord's church is now God's house (First Timothy 3:14,15), and its members are said to be the temple of God (First Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:16). Ephesians 2:19-22 also presents the church as a "*building fitly framed together... unto a holy temple in the Lord.*"

What had the people in Corinth and Ephesus done that made them the temple of God? Acts 18:8, "*And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians believed, and were baptized.*" Acts 19:1-5 we read where Paul baptized men of Ephesus in the name of Christ. These people had heard the gospel, believed in Christ, and obeyed the commands of the gospel, including being baptized.

God no longer dwells in a physical temple as He did in the tabernacle and temple of the Old Testament (Acts 7:48; 17:24). There were three physical temples in Israel's history. The first was built by Solomon some four hundred eighty years after Israel entered Canaan. It took seven years to build and was destroyed when the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem. The second temple was the one built under the leadership of Zerubbabel after Judah returned from Babylonian captivity. This temple gradually fell into the state of disrepair. Herod's temple, the largest of the three and the one standing during the life of Jesus on earth,

took forty six years to build. It too was destroyed when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

The temple was first proposed by David. But permission was denied him to build the temple because he was a man of war and there was so much conflict around him during his reign (Second Samuel 7:1,2; First Chronicles 28:3). But David was told that his son Solomon would build it and David was permitted to gather many of the materials that would be used in its construction (First Chronicles 28:6). There are a number of parallels between the temple and the church. At this point one should leave our remarks and familiarize himself with the record of First Kings 5:1-11 concerning the building of Solomon's temple.

Solomon's Temple

The first temple was built by Solomon. The church was built by Jesus Christ (Matthew 16:16-18).

Solomon was on the throne as king when the temple was built. Christ had already ascended into heaven to be at the right hand of God at the time the church came into existence on Pentecost (Acts 2: 33,34). This was as Daniel had prophesied when he told of the Son of man going to the Ancient of Days (God, the Father) and being given a kingdom (Daniel 7:13,14).

Adversaries had been defeated before the temple was built. The constant plague of enemies was one element in the denial to David's request to build the temple (First Kings 5:1-5). Christ did not build His church until He had conquered the great adversary, the devil. Hebrews 2:14, *"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."* Christ had said that even the gates of Hades would not prevail against His church (Matthew 16:20). This meant that nothing, not even His own death, would prevent the church from being established. Furthermore, Peter preached, Acts 2: 25:27, *"For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved; therefore did my heart rejoice,*

and my tongue was glad, moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope; because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption."

Material for the temple was brought out of another kingdom. Solomon got cedars from Lebanon (First Kings 5: 8-10) with the cooperation of Hiram, king of Tyre. The material that enters into the temple of God, His church, also comes from another kingdom. There are two spiritual kingdoms, one belonging to God, and the other to the devil. Those in the kingdom of God are those who have been delivered out of the power of darkness and translated into God's kingdom (Colossians 1:13). Every Christian was once in the kingdom of death, but now is a citizen in the kingdom of life.

Prepared Material

Material that went into Solomon's temple was prepared for the temple (First Kings 5:6). The timber was cut and the stones were hewed to precision to the extent that when these materials were put together they fit perfectly and the temple was erected without the sound of the hammer nor axe (First Kings 6:7). Those who enter the Lord's church are also prepared to enter. We are prepared by being taught and converted to Christ, our sins being washed away by His blood, and we are thereby made fit for the new temple of God.

The materials that went into Solomon's temple were paid for before they went into the temple (First Kings 5:11). Solomon gave Hiram the payment before they were placed into the temple. A similar thing has taken place regarding those of us who make up the church, the temple of God. The blood of Christ was the price paid for the church (Acts 20:28). He shed His blood at Calvary while men were yet in their sins (Romans 5:8). If the price had not been paid there could not have been the temple.

The material was brought across the water before it was placed into the temple (First Kings 5:9). After the cedars were cut they were conveyed to Israel by means of water. Similarly, one enters the temple of God, the church, by means of water, being baptized in water by the authority

of Christ for the remission of sins. One is baptized into the body (First Corinthians 12:13) which is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23) which is also God's temple (Ephesians 2:19-22). Those who make up the church or temple have been born again, "*born of water and the Spirit*" (John 3:3-5).

The Finished Product

When the temple was completed it was considered beautiful, holy, sacred, being filled with the glory of God. Isaiah said of the temple when bemoaning its destruction that was to come, he called it, "*Our holy and beautiful house*" (Isaiah 64:11). Similarly, Paul said of the church, Ephesians 5:27, "*That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such things; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*"

In the temple the priests of God offered their sacrifices. In the church, every Christian is a priest for we make up a holy priesthood (First Peter 2:5). There is no such thing as a clergy-laity system in the Lord's church like you find in the denominations which are of human rather than divine origin. Service to God is to be done as one is a member of His church. It is in the church that we offer our sacrifices and do the work God has commanded of us.

Solomon's temple was a physical building. But the church, even though it is presented as a building, is not a physical house. Even some brethren must think the church building where we meet for worship is some sanctified and holy place because they disallow eating in the church building because to do so would be a sin against its holiness. Language is often loosely spoken by brethren that tends to reveal a misunderstanding of what the church is. I have a beautiful rolltop desk that I purchased from a good sister who had it in her garage. I thought she was going to sell it to somebody else who could pay more for it than I, but she graciously sold it to me with the explanation that she wanted to keep it in the church. I think I knew what she meant. I told her in jest that I did not know who baptized it, big as it is, but I am glad they did. You have to be baptized to be in the

church. But the church is a spiritual house made up of people who have been spiritually redeemed by the blood of Christ. We are living stones. We are the temple of God.

A Significant Difference

We have noted several similarities between Solomon's temple and the Lord's church. Without doubt the temple was a part of the shadows of things to come, a type of the Lord's church. But we can also note one tremendous difference. Solomon's temple was destroyed. The Lord's church shall never be destroyed but shall last forever (Daniel 2:44). Death could not prevail against its beginning, nor shall anything prevail against its eternal glory. As we often sing, "It shall stand."

When you study the Scriptures you are impressed with the tie between the Old and New Testaments. You soon learn, even about the temple, that it was more than just a holy place of worship and service to God under the old law of Moses, with all of its compartments, courts, furnishings, and tapestries. It was really a type of that which was to come. We see in Scripture the gradual unfolding of God's place for redeeming man which He designed and determined before the foundation of the world. We read the prophecies, promises, and Old Testament pictures of the system of salvation through Christ. These things have been fulfilled in Christ and His church. Now God lives and dwells in and with His temple, the church. As people hear, believe, obey, and continue faithful to follow His Word, so Deity lives within them through that Word. We enter the temple by faith, repentance, confession of Christ, and baptism for the remission of sins. The Lord then adds us to His church (Acts 2:47), which means we become a part of His temple. Are you a "*living stone*" in the temple of God?

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With this issue we complete fifteen full volumes of **A Burning Fire**. Our present plans call for two, possibly three, more volumes before our resources are exhausted for this work. JWB

God's Way To Happiness

Happiness is much sought after by all mankind. It has proven to be elusive, difficult to attain, difficult to retain. But God wants people to be genuinely happy. The faith of Jesus Christ is not totally for the next world but also for this one. Following Christ is the way of happiness.

When people are asked what they want out of life, what they want for their children, what is their wish for the world, time and time again the answer is that happiness is the goal. We hear the words of refugees who flee their homelands and come to this country say openly and repeatedly that they have come seeking happiness.

To be happy is accepted and recognized as a desirable end. Therefore, people make great efforts to be happy. Many make terrible mistakes trying to reach happiness and even do things that destroy the possibility of happiness in their search. But we know that God wants people to be happy because He has provided and taught the way of happiness. What we also need to learn is that God's way to happiness is not the way that men devise. As in other things, the way of the Lord is the right way and the way of man is the way of deception and death, and is inferior to the way of the Lord (Proverbs 14:12); Jeremiah 10:23; Isaiah 55:9).

Ways That Fail

In our lesson we want to consider ways that men have tried and failed to be happy. Our study is primarily from the book of Ecclesiastes and the inspired report thought Solomon. We need such a study to set our goals, establish proper priorities, and learn "to keep our head on straight."

Solomon had power, prestige, honor, and prominence in this world (2:9) "*So I was great and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem...*" He was evidently

impressed with his own greatness in the eyes of the people of this world. With his power as king he obtained whatever he wished. He had armies, chariots, menservants, maidservants, nations were paying tribute to him, everyone feared and respected him for his worldly greatness, honor, and prestige.

There is such a striving among some people for recognition, seeking popularity, and acceptance. Some are willing to pay almost any price to be ranked among men. They use all means to obtain the limelight, even do weird and bazaar things to get recognition and feel important. What they are doing is feeding their ego and trying to enlarge themselves before their fellowman. Yet, few shall ever approach the extent that Solomon had in all these things. Even so, they did not bring him happiness. *"Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labor that I had labored to do; and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun"* (2:11). Vexation means annoyance, something troublesome, disturbing, even productive of harassment.

How many times have we seen lived before us the misery, insecurity, unhappiness of prominent people who admit they would exchange it all for the peace of the humble man who may have very little of the recognition this world can afford! Prominence, while not sinful in itself, is simply not the way to happiness. But too few people ever really learn that lesson but continue to seek and pursue it.

More Failure

Solomon had wealth. Probably as much or more than any other single element, wealth is mentioned by people as a necessary ingredient to possess in order to be happy. If wealth would ever make one happy it should have brought happiness to Solomon. First Kings 10:23, *"So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom."* He had a throne of ivory, drinking vessels of gold, navies that constantly brought riches to him from abroad. The Queen of Sheba heard of this wealth and wisdom and wanted to see for herself. After

seeing she exclaimed that half was not told her (First Kings 10:7).

It is disappointing to so many in our materialistic age to learn, after spending themselves in seeking and acquiring wealth, that such is not capable of producing what they sought. Ecclesiastes 5:10, *"He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase; this is also vanity."* Verse twelve, *"The sleep of a laboring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep."* Verses fifteen and sixteen, *"As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labor, which he may carry away in his hand. And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go; and what profit hath he that hath labored for the wind?"*

Jesus said, Luke 12:15, *"Take heed of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."* It is not this way because riches are necessarily evil in themselves. They are not. But one may have all such things and yet not be happy. Some of the most miserable people on earth are wealthy. Those who want to be rich often drain their very lives and spirits in quest of wealth, only to find they have reached for the wind, piercing themselves through with many sorrows (First Timothy 6:10).

Additional Failures

Solomon sought and enjoyed the pleasures of this world, satisfying himself in whatever he desired. Some confuse happiness with fun, frolic, having a "big time," letting yourself go, being on an exciting "high," attending parties, entertainments, drunkenness, satisfying the physical lusts and appetites. I once stayed in the home of a man while preaching in a gospel meeting who told me he once had gone the ways of pleasure seeking, living a wicked life in self-indulgence. But he confessed it only brought him disgrace. He learned that the only real happiness is in living God's way rather than trying to fill life with the pleasure of sin (Hebrews 11:25). While all pleasure is not sinful, the grasping to satisfy one's desires with the sinful pleasures has been demonstrated

repeatedly not to be the way of human happiness. Sin pays, but the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Ecclesiastes 1:17; 2:1, *"And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit... I said in mine heart, Go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and behold, this also is vanity."*

Solomon uniquely possessed the knowledge and wisdom of this world. First Kings 10:24, *"And all the earth sought to Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart."* Here was an area where Solomon not only had acquisition but in which he excelled. Jesus referred to him as a wise man. But some seem to think that to have knowledge for knowledge's sake will bring them satisfaction for which the soul of man longs. This was one of the misconceptions of the people of Athens before whom Paul preached (Acts 17: 20,21). Some people make themselves professional students, ever learning, but never coming to a knowledge of the truth.

Knowledge can be very beneficial and we would not for a moment ridicule the desire to know and the blessings knowledge can afford. But it cannot produce the happiness of heart and life that man wants and needs. One can know many things, but unless he knows what really matters his knowledge is ultimately for naught. Some of the most educated and worldly-wise people on earth are classified as the most malcontent. This is because the attainment of worldly knowledge does not produce happiness. Ecclesiastes 1:18, *"For in much wisdom is much grief; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."*

An Inescapable Conclusion

The only conclusion we draw at this point in our lesson is that such things for which so many strive so hard simply have not the capacity to provide that which is really sought. But in spite of the abundant evidence of this truth, it is not likely that people will cease pursuing these paths in search of happiness. Should not the vanity these things produce cause us to turn our attentions elsewhere in the pursuit of happiness? While we do not advocate crushing proper ambitions, but would

rather exhort that we take advantage of the good such things could produce, we must insist that we accept the limitations of them. They cannot bring to mankind that "*peace of God, which passeth all understanding.*" (Philippians 4:7). One might find happiness even with these things in his possession, but it will not be because of these things he is happy. One can have happiness without them. Solomon reached the conclusion, Ecclesiastes 12:13,14, "*Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.*"

Why Not Listen to God?

There are hundreds of beatitudes in the Bible, expressions that speak of happiness, as well as other passages that are concerned with earthly happiness and where and how it can be found. From these we learn the source and definition of genuine happiness.

Blessedness is a kind of happiness, but much more than mere happiness. It has been said that happiness depends on what is happening, but blessedness is not affected by what happens. Blessedness is more than being light hearted, free from care, being a "good time Charley." Blessedness is more a state of mind, a spiritual condition of the soul that describes one's relationship with man and God. Blessedness, different from happiness which is determined by environment and circumstances, is an inward quality, a contentment of spirit, that derives its existence because of one's relationship with God. It comes from knowing you are right with God; knowing you have done your best; living with a clean conscience that has been trained according to God's will. It is a contentment that is not to be confused with disinterest or lethargy, but is a deep inward, spiritual stability that is not and cannot be shaken by events that befall us. Having laid hold on what really matters and what counts, having what lasts, what is eternal, knowing you are a child of God with a purpose for living, knowing where you are going and why, this is what brings the blessedness of which we speak. This is the ultimate earthly happiness.

An Array of Scriptures

The best part of any lesson is the Word of God. The following passages present to us a portion of the Scriptural information regarding the way of happiness.

Psalm 1:1,2, "*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.*"

Psalm 2:12, "*Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.*"

Psalm 84:4, "*Blessed are they that dwell in thy house.*" Keep in mind that the New Testament teaches that God's house is His church.

Psalm 106:3, "*Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times.*" Happiness is found in right doing.

Job 5:17, "*Happy is the man who God correcteth.*"

Psalm 144:15, "*Happy is that people whose God is the Lord.*"

Psalm 146:5, "*Happy is he that has the God of Jacob for his help; whose hope is in the Lord his God.*"

Proverbs 8:32, "*Blessed are they that keep my ways.*"

Proverbs 16:20, "*Whoso trusteth the Lord, happy is he.*"

Proverbs 29:18, "*He that keepeth the law, happy is he.*"

After teaching humility and the greatness in serving, John 13:7, Jesus said, "*If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.*" There is a principle stated here that we must grasp, Happiness is produced by doing as well as thinking. Knowing to do right and failing to do right will destroy happiness. Happiness cannot be ours through neglect. James 4:17, "*Therefore to him that*

knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." We cannot be happy in sin.

First Peter 3:14; 4:14, *"But and if ye suffer for righteousness sake happy are ye... If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye."* Happiness is available even in trying times provided you are doing what is eternally true.

Luke 11:28, *"Blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep is."*

Psalms 40:4, *"Blessed is the man that maketh the Lord his trust."*

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 of sins, having the Father-child relationship with God is the real source of happiness and blessedness.

Revelation 22:14, *"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."*

Turn and read the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew five. These statements are not just a code of ethics, or a moral code, but much more. They are a part of the gospel of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23), presenting qualities that characterize those who would make up His kingdom. They are "Pentecost Pointers," pointing toward that notable day when the kingdom of God, His church, would come into existence. As you read, note the spiritual traits that bring about the blessedness of which Christ spoke.

In summary, we can say of happiness, the kind of happiness that is blessedness, that it is serving God and serving Him faithfully. May it be the lot of each one to know and cherish this happiness.

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The Christian Man as Leader and Provider

Partners in marriage are to function as a team, as we wrote in our most recent issue. The operation of the home requires teamwork. But every team must have a leader. Also, there are certain necessary provisions, material and spiritual, in making a home. Every home, therefore, must have a provider. It is our goal in this lesson to present the Biblical pattern that the Christian husband and father is to be the leader and provider in the marriage and the home.

Let us first consider a few basic and fundamental principles that need restating. Marriage and the home is of divine origin, design, and purpose. God must be considered and His will be the governing element. The home and family were founded with the intent to bless all mankind. Companionship is fundamental to a marriage and home. Each one in the home, husband, wife, and children, has privileges and responsibilities. We cannot leave God out of the operation of the home and marriage and expect them to be what God says they are supposed to be.

Specific Roles

In God's scheme of things the man is the leader in the home. He was created first (Genesis 1,2; First Corinthians 11:3; First Timothy 3:13) and as surely as Christ is over the man the man is designated to be over the woman as decreed by God.

Woman was created for man as a suitable companion. All the animals had passed before Adam and though he probably could appreciate the need for a companion, none were suitable for him. So God made woman from his rib, one of his own kind, of his own flesh and bones. She did not become his slave nor was she less human than he. She also had needs and among them was the need of companionship. But God's revelation tells us of

the rank that God specified. We will have more to say on this matter as the lesson progresses.

Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, understood that the law of Moses taught that a wife was to be subject to her husband (First Corinthians 14:34,35). Since she is subject unto him, he necessarily must assume the duties of headship and leadership. Where goes subjection of the woman to the man must go man's responsibility to lead. He cannot neglect this duty anymore than she can neglect being in subjection.

The truth regarding this matter does not suggest inferiority but notes the difference between the husband and the wife and the distinction of roles each is to fill. If we asked which was superior, a tractor or a wristwatch, we would realize that they cannot be compared in all particulars because they serve different roles and functions. So it is with man and woman.

He is the Head

The New Testament teaches that man is the head and must lead the unit (Ephesians 5:22,23; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:5). This places responsibility on the man that he cannot shirk nor honorably delegate to another. We are sorry this divine design does not please everyone, but it does please those who love the will of God, both man and woman. Who is not pleased with such a design? It does not please men who wish to shirk their duties. It does not please women who wish to usurp authority and have dominion, or who have a strong distaste for the feminine role. It does not please the distorted misfits who would promote the unisex society, or would confuse the roles of men and women, attempting to promote the ridiculous idea that men and women are alike and equal in all respects. God, who made the human race, knows far better what is best for humanity than innovators who denounce God and prefer to follow their own perversions and confusions. Experience proves His way to be the most beneficial and fitting for society and the human family. The reversal and confusion of role causes strife, jealousy, divorce, homosexuality, lesbianism, and general moral and family decay, such as we are witnessing in American society today. We are seeing the

advance of havoc promoted by those who hate God and His righteousness.

Weak Men

The lack of a strong masculine figure in the home minimizes the stability of boys in their masculine roles. Girls who have weak fathers and domineering mothers are those most prone to seek security in giving themselves in immorality to some man who asserts his masculinity. Boys who grow to maturity without benefit of the male image from some source never grasp the real distinction between male and female and are not likely to fulfill their role they should discharge.

Sometimes the roles of both husband and wife are imposed on a person due to death, illness, or some other intrusion into the general relationship. In this we often see God's providence at work because it seems when such things are forced into people's lives they have a way of combatting the effects because they retain a proper understanding of the role of male and female. But when the roles are deliberately exchanged or forsaken, not because of uncommon tragedy, but because of divorce or other manifestations of selfishness, the problems surmount. In the first instance necessity is offset by other means. But in the second the heart is confused and rebellion leaves its ugly mark on everyone involved.

The Provider

The man and husband has the primary duty and privilege to provide what is needful for the home, both materially and spiritually (First Timothy 5:8; Second Corinthians 12:14; Genesis 3:19). There is far more to being a good provider than simply providing material needs, and this is an area where many husband and fathers have really failed. Some are quite able to provide dollars, but not the guidance, love, and example that is vital. So many "men" leave the spiritual training and example solely to the wife and mother while they shirk one of the most awesome and sacred responsibilities in the home (Ephesians 6:4). Proverbs 17:6, "*Children's children are the crown of old men; and the glory of children are their fathers.*" Unfortunately, some fathers are a

scourge, disgrace, handicap, and millstone about the neck of their children and children's children because they show no real concern for the spiritual welfare of their offspring and descendants.

The father being the provider does not entirely forbid the wife and mother from assisting in this task anymore than it prohibits the father and husband from assisting the wife and mother in her roles. There may arise those times when necessity demands she assist. We make a big mistake to think a wife and mother is not making material and physical provision unless she is employed gainfully outside the home. Many women are employed outside the home and the consequences of this arrangement demands more consideration be given to it. Taking all things into account, such arrangements have not generally proven beneficial to society and mankind because children suffer from it. People need to realize there is a great difference between women working outside the home due to need and working due to greed. Selfishness, lust for things, materialistic attitudes have provoked much of what we see in families today. The primary duty of the wife and mother is to her home and family. She is to guide the house (First Timothy 5:14), bear children (First Timothy 5:13), be keepers (workers) at home (Titus 2:5), and if and when other pursuits interfere or prevent her accomplishing her primary task effectively as a homemaker, mother, and wife, she has confused her role. It is a wrong attitude for men to hold, men who want their wives to work outside the home, just so they can have more of this world's goods, even to the neglect of the care, security, training, health, protection, and general welfare of home and children. Realizing this does not set well with much of modern American today, we stoutly insist that modern society is not the best one to set our standards, but the will of Almighty God.

The Wife and Mother

While we speak of the role of the man primarily in this lesson, we must at the same time consider his mate. Some have emphasized other careers for women than that of wife, mother, homemaker. They have actually belittled and ridiculed this God-given and divinely

assigned role. They sneeringly refer to her as "just a housewife," as if those who are in the factories and offices are the superior ones. That is just so much Satanic ammunition being exploded to the destruction of many marriages, homes, resulting in divorces, and distraught children. The harvest of such distortion will not be reaped in just one generation. Furthermore, this doctrine of the modern antagonists of God that one is a better wife and mother if she forsakes her home and pursues her own goals and career makes about as much sense as one being a better baseball player if he forsakes the game. Young women are urged to "take care of yourself first" even if the family and marriage to which they were supposed to have committed themselves suffers. While there is nothing wrong in taking care of yourself, we ought to teach people not to assume roles they do not intend to fill. One should make up his mind before he commits and once committed realize the duties he or she have and fill them. Doing this may prevent someone from accomplishing some self-serving ambition but there are things more important than simply doing what you want to do. Does anybody really consider doing what they ought to do before just doing what they want? We all should.

Family Under Attack

From every quarter we witness attacks against the family, and the role of the man in the family. This should concern the Christian. The television, comic strips, magazine articles present the father as a blundering and ignorant fool that just cannot seem to get it together. The adoration of women assuming the work and roles of men, that they are superior in every realm, from being the company president to driving a tractor, or being a combat pilot, are designed to turn society into a matriarchal and anti-Biblical society.

We have been shocked (but it has become so propagated that instances have become commonplace) at the swapping the role of man and woman. The wife and mother, being far superior to her husband and father in the family, leaves the home to make the material provisions and the husbands and fathers stay home to be the keepers in the home, the very opposite of the roles

God designed for men and women. This appeals to some men who have been called "real go-getters," that is, they take their wives to work and then "go get her." Surely, there is to be a sharing in the operation of the home. But there is also to be a leader and provider and God says that the man should assume and shoulder that responsibility. We have so many no-good males today that it is often hard to find a man, a real man, who will do as God teaches he should. We sure need to teach our young sons how to be God's man.

With the advance of the so-called "women's liberation" movement there has been a corresponding decrease of respect for womanhood. There is less courtesy, chivalry, and politeness. Many women have just become "one of the boys." They have knocked themselves off the pedestal where God placed them and are attempting to become what they were never intended to be. Where do people get the idea that just because something can be done that it ought to be done, and that if it can be done then it must be right to do it?

There doubtless may be an isolated exception here and there, but what has taken place regarding the role of the man, and confusion of women, has caused more grief and havoc in the home and society than can be corrected in a short span, if ever. People who live so rebelliously against God may well have to experience utter destruction before things get more as they ought to be. Surely, that has been the case in many nations and kingdoms of which we read in history, including the Bible.

While many men are too mixed up to be real men, and many women see his cowardly ways and his unwillingness to assume the male role, this does not impeach the rule and design of the Lord. Regardless of what society does, says, or thinks, or even what you may or may not do, God's way remains the same, and it is the best, and if we be as wise as we like to profess ourselves to be we will listen and give heed to the will of the Lord.

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Offending Little Ones

Jesus taught about little ones, children, using them to illustrate what should be the nature and character of those who make up His kingdom (Matthew 9:36-42). In verse forty-two, He said, "*And whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe on me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.*" There cannot be any doubt regarding the Lord's displeasure with those who offend His children. Should not this teaching cause us to be more cautious how we deal with each other?

We hear and read so much about "child abuse" in the degenerate society of America as well as other nations. We are shocked and angered over such as that. Such offense has no excuse. The explanation is simply ungoldliness on the part of those who commit such things. But our righteous indignation should extend to those who choose to offend Christians also, including those heretics who divide and bring error among us.

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