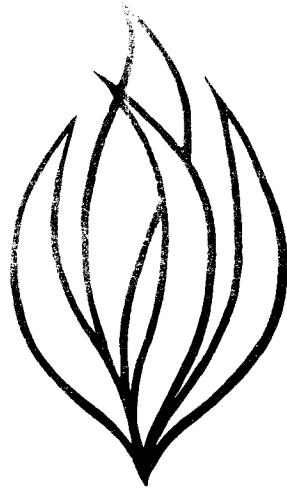


A Burning Fire



“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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It Is Too Much

Our lesson is taken from the Old Testament at the time in Israel's history when the nation had recently divided and Jeroboam was king in northern Israel. We center our attention on the first action that Jeroboam took upon becoming king. It was an effort to keep the people from returning to Jerusalem, which was under the rule of Rehoboam, Solomon's son, and to prevent the influence of Rehoboam from winning back the loyalty of the people away from Jeroboam. Jerusalem was located in the southern kingdom and that was where the people were supposed to go to worship.

"And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David; if this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah. Whereupon the king took counsel and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold, thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel and the other put he in Dan. And this thing became a sin; for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan." (First Kings 12:26-31).

Why He Appealed

On the special feast days and other days of religious observance, the people were expected to be at the temple in Jerusalem. Fearing the effect that might be produced by having his people go there, Jeroboam provided places of worship for the people of northern Israel within the borders of his own rule. Dan was in the northern part of northern Israel and Bethel in the southern part of northern Israel. He appealed to the people on the basis that it was too much to expect them to make the journey to Jerusalem and they could worship God at these other places. This appeal found attentive ears among the people, but God was greatly displeased with this attitude and action.

We are able to see clearly how Jeroboam was acting sinfully. He acted rebelliously and we have no problem detecting it. Regardless of what might have been more convenient for the

people, it was God's will that they present themselves at the temple. His will should have been first with them. While their motives for not going to Jerusalem was not the sly and sinister motive of Jeroboam, they were not found blameless for their indifference toward their duty.

We often have difficulty in seeing the same kind of attitude in ourselves that those people exhibited. *"Therefore, thou art inexcusable O man, whosoever thou art that judgest; for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself, for thou that judgest doest the same things. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?"* (Romans 2:1-3). The attitude that what God requires is too much is found among many who profess to be Christians today. It makes itself known by the words and actions, and lack of actions, on the part of too many people. Jeroboam was wrong in his heart and deed. We rightly condemn him for it. Why do we sometimes do the same things in principle?

Evidence Of An Attitude

This "it is too much attitude" manifests itself so clearly in the wide difference between attendance figures on Sunday morning and the other hours of assembly, such as Sunday night and Wednesday night services. Why do so many dismiss Sunday evening worship opportunities? Do they think they have already done enough by being present Sunday morning? Are we content to do just as little as we feel will "get us by"? Those who have the "have to" attitude toward worship rather than the "get to" attitude are missing something very important.

A man asked me once if I thought Hebrews 10:25, which teaches not for forsake the assembly, applied to Wednesday night as forcefully as the worship service where the Lord's Supper was observed. Having already been warned about this man and how he constantly argued against attending on Wednesday night, I answered him in a way that he obviously did not expect. I said, "No, I think there is a distinction to be made. You might not be lost for violating Hebrews 10:25 because you missed Wednesday night. But the possibility is that one could be lost because of the attitude to do as little as possible and still please God. One would be lacking the basic quality for going to heaven, and that is putting the kingdom of God first." Needless to say our conversation was abbreviated by those remarks, but

the point was made. When we consider worship nothing but duty, which it does involve, but never a privilege to show honor and praise to God, we have the wrong attitude toward it from the start.

Why should it be thought too much to worship God with the brethren more than once per week? If we genuinely love God and one another, is not the time of worship a period of delight? Since His Word is taught and studied, would not our love for the Word draw us to the assembly? If heaven meant more than anything else, why would we try to get there by some "short cut" religion that may cause us to miss our goal? Truly, if we are converted as we must be, and have given our lives to Christ, we will not ever ask, "Do I have to attend?" We never heard of anybody thinking being in the presence of those they love as being undesirable.

Knowledge Is Necessary

Is it too much to come to a knowledge of God's Word for man? Do we not realize that we shall be judged by that which Jesus taught? *"He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day."* (John 12:48). This being true, it is unreasonable that we would not want to know what that Word teaches. Yet, it is apparent that many think it too much to regularly, consistently, habitually study God's Word. In most congregations, over half of the membership do not attend Bible study Sunday morning. Even a lower percentage attends Wednesday evening. In which half of the congregation do you stand?

Nothing shows the attitude of "it is too much" more than the failure to observe the Lord's Supper every first day of the week. There are doctrines of men that teach this observance once per month, or once per quarter, or other periods. But the New Testament shows us when the early church observed the Lord's Supper and that was every first day of the week (Acts 20:7; First Corinthians 11:23ff; First Corinthians 16:1,2). The Supper was observed in the assembly which occurred every first day. Every week has a first day. What right does any man have to specify one first day to the exclusion of any other? Nobody can worship in this way for you. Each must worship for himself. Nobody can sing for you, pray for you as if you need never pray, give for you, study for you, nor partake of the Lord's Supper for you.

This is a personal duty before God for each Christian.

There are those that can miss this observance and memorial to Christ without any pain of conscience whatever. The slightest and most minute matter can detract their attention and they will ignore their sacred duty to proclaim Christ by the Lord's Supper. When they first started missing they were somewhat concerned. Now they have so flippantly disobeyed the Lord's will that they are not even moved by the fact that they are sinning against the very Son of God by whom they shall be judged. Some want the benefits of His death, burial, and resurrection, but do not want to take the time and show the respect to Him that is in the Lord's Supper.

When we observe the Lord's Supper only on those occasions when it is convenient to us, it is doubtful that we are even obeying the Lord then. We are doing more according to our will than His even then. That is not obedience.

Deliberate absenteeism is a symptom of the attitude that Jeroboam tried to get all the people of Israel to adopt. "*It is too much.*"

Who Will Care?

Do I really think these thoughts will provoke people to be more attentive to their duty in worship and study? Yes, but only those who are honest and who really care about what the Lord's Word teaches. I know it will not be very impressive on the rest.

We might stop and consider it just may be too much to get to heaven. It just may require a greater love and sacrifice than some of us are willing to give. We just may be in hell because we considered, "*It is too much.*"

If we could, we would persuade each one that it is never too much to go the way of the Lord. How glad we are that Jesus did not complain and refuse to die for our sins and say, "*It is too much.*" When we consider what Deity has done on our behalf, how can we ever say too much is asked of us to serve Him?

† † † † †

Testing Kings

In Second Kings, chapter three, we find a discussion of a historical event involving Israel, Judah, Edom, and Moab. At the time of the event, the Israelite people were divided into two nations, Israel of the north and Judah of the south. So long as Ahab, the king of northern Israel lived, the Moabites paid tribute to him with animals and other gifts. When Ahab died and his son, Jehoram became king, the Moabites refused to continue their tribute. Jehoram decided to make war against the Moabites and asked Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, to be his ally. In addition, they sought the aid of the king of Edom. So these three kings set out to do battle against the Moabites.

On their way they ran out of water for themselves, their men and their animals. The kings became fearful, almost in panic, lest they become the victims of the Moabites rather than victors as they planned. Jehoshaphat called for a prophet of God and Elisha came. Elisha said he would have nothing whatever to do with the king of Israel and Edom if it were not for Jehoshaphat. Israel had been led deeper into idolatry by Jehoram, and Edom was a heathen nation. Nonetheless, for the sake of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, which held to some semblance of respect for God, Elisha consented to inquire of God for them.

God's Instructions

Through Elisha, God spoke, giving instructions to the kings. They were promised water without rain and victory over the Moabites. It was a conditional promise. Their blessings were dependent upon them doing what God commanded of them. Actually, commands were tests of the kings. God tested them. The command was rather simple in nature. *"Make this valley full of ditches."* The Lord would then fill them with water.

God has always tested man and does so now. The tests may vary from time to time and age to age, but the purposes of the tests are usually about the same. By this test, God tested four important attitudes of these kings who had come to Him for help.

His command was a test of their faith in God. They had asked for God's help. Now would they follow what He directed? If they really had confidence in God, they would obey. If they lacked

that confidence, they would cast His command aside.

It was a good test because there was no way that they saw how God could do what He promised. He told them there would be water, but also said there would be no rain. So how would God do it? There was no logical connection between what was commanded and what was the promised result. To have obeyed God because they understood it all and could see the reasons behind it would have been more accepting of God's wisdom which agreed with what they concluded. To do as God commanded when they could not see any reason for it would mean wholesome obedience.

Doing what God says because "it makes sense" to us is not showing the right kind of faith. Doing what God says because God said it even if we do not see why, that is obeying and demonstrating faith.

A Test

This command was a test of their willingness to obey. The line of their duty was clearly drawn. "Make a ditch." They were kings and usually gave commands, not take them. Would they obey? Would they humble themselves to submit to a higher authority? Would their pride provoke them to resist? Would they offer excuses or try to rationalize around doing what God commanded? Possibly they might suggest a substitute way.

They did none of those things. God commanded; they obeyed. There were no excuses, no delays. They were willing to do what God directed.

We need to ask ourselves if we are so willing as were they? Is it not unreasonable to expect God's blessings when we question His way? If we hold out on God, what reason is there to think He will bless us anyway? "*Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*" said Jesus (Luke 6:46).

This matter was a test of their willingness to cooperate one with the other. Here were men from different nations working together before God. They had a common goal and single purpose. When people will cooperate and work together, rather than against one another, much can be done that otherwise would go undone. Actually, there is no room in the church, the home, or in a Christian's life that will not work harmoniously with others. Sometimes there are members of the church who want to go their own way and only their own way, standing aloof from everyone else, just because they did not get their

way. This is not the same as remaining separated from those who do not follow God's way. We are talking about people who have to have their own way in doing what God says do but has not specified how it is to be done.

If these kings could not work together in digging ditches, they would not likely work together in warfare either. By working together, they were actually working together with God. They were not just working with one another. If they had refused to cooperate, their lack of cooperation would have been toward God as much as toward each other.

Is it not true that a cooperative attitude is needful in getting the work of the church done and done properly? When God gives the word, we should help each other do what God says every way we can.

Would They Work?

This was a test of their willingness to work. Too many people have the attitude, "Here am I, Lord, use him." Getting these ditches dug would require work, patience, steadfastness, strength. They wanted to be spared from the Moabites and win over them. Were they willing to do their part, or did they want it all handed to them, as is said, "on a silver platter without effort on their part?"

Many people today really want to go to heaven. But they are not willing to do their part. They rely totally on God to do what they want done even if they do not follow God's plan. Man working alone will not avail, but man working God's plan will get the job done. Who is willing to work as God has commanded?

Work is honorable and there is no substitute for it. Christ worked, the Father works, we must work. Work for the night is coming when man works no more! These kings, and their soldiers, were obviously willing to put forth the effort required to obey God's plan of victory.

They passed every test. They did show confidence in God, were willing to obey, cooperated together, and worked what had to be done.

The Result

First, they had ample water. Second, as the chapter reveals, when the Moabites saw the sun reflecting off the water they mistakingly took it for blood, assumed the kings had fought each

other, rushed in for the spoils, and were handed a solid and ruinous defeat.

The principles are plain and easily understood. We must have faith in Christ and do what He says, even if you do not comprehend why He may have commanded as He did. Many stumble at baptism saying, "I don't see how getting down in the water will do anything for my soul?" Well, if one will just study this account just a bit he will see that obedience is doing what God says because God said it.

Are you willing to cooperate with God and others in doing His will? Are you a ready worker for the Lord? You have your test just as the kings had their test.

As they gained victory, God will give each one who will pass the test a spiritual victory over sin. Victory belongs to those who love the Lord enough to do what He commands and with the right attitude toward it. What of you?

† † † † †

The Power Of God

Some passages of the Bible stand out more than others. It is not because they are more inspired because all of the Scripture is inspired. It is not because they are more important because all are important in their context. It is because in them are found key thoughts, all inclusive and comprehensive concepts.

John 3:16 is one such passage. The same might be said of Revelation 2:10, Micah 6:8, and others. Surely Romans 1:16 is such a passage. It provides us the "key" to the book of Romans, a great doctrinal book that presents to us as full a picture of the system of salvation as is to be found in one New Testament writing. As we consider a few thoughts in Romans 1:16 we exalt the gospel of Christ, that one message above all others that deserves man's complete attention.

What is the gospel of Christ? It is good news that has come from Christ, that is about Christ, that belongs to Christ, that embraces the scheme or system that Deity devised and delivered for the salvation of man from his sins. It is "good news" because man, lost in his transgressions, can be saved. It is the "glad tidings" of redemption for the soul.

A Revelation

The New Testament is more than a record of historical events and doctrines. It is an account of something that happened in this world that God designed for the benefit of mankind. It is a revelation from God, of God, to man, and for man. Therein is the philosophy of life that has been revealed by the Creator of life. Therein is the religion, the moral and spiritual principles and teachings that have come from the mind of Deity. *"Therein is revealed the righteousness of God..."* (verse 17).

The founder and author of the New Testament faith, the only begotten Son of the true and living God, is revealed to us as God's noblest creation.

Paul said he was not ashamed of the gospel. It is accurate to say that Paul was proud of the gospel. He was proud to have the privilege to preach the gospel. He was thankful for what the gospel did, from whence it came, the dignity and benefit it produced. He proclaimed it with boldness, clarity, without hesitation, fear nor favor, and to its fullest extent. *"For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."* (Acts 20:27). Whether he was before friends or foes, Paul demonstrated that he was never ashamed of the gospel. He was not ashamed of it in Athens, the center of culture and education. He was not ashamed of it in Corinth, a focal point of immorality, lasciviousness, all manner of moral degeneracy. He was not ashamed of it in Ephesus, even in the presence of idolatry and Diana, the goddess of the Ephesians. Nor was he ashamed to proclaim the gospel in Jerusalem, the city of the Jews, steeped in traditionalism, ritualism, religious and racial prejudice. Before kings and peasants alike, in freedom or in bondage, to male and female, Paul was proud of the gospel of Christ. So should we be proud of it. We ought never be ashamed at the shop, in school, in the office, at play, at work, at home, at the assembly, never, anywhere, anytime dare we reflect against the gospel by being ashamed of it. It came from God.

Romans 1:15 reads, *"So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also."* Rome was the capital of one of the most ruthless, bloody, merciless governments that has existed. Yet, Paul looked forward to preaching the gospel of peace with God in that environment. When he was taken there as a prisoner, he did spend his time teaching and preaching whenever and wherever permitted.

Power

Paul tells us four basic and fundamental reasons why he was so proud of the gospel. The gospel is power. People respect power. There are many kinds of power, such as economic, military, muscular, mental, and the power of the natural world. The gospel is a spiritual power that influences the heart and conscience of the human being. In this way it governs, guides, and controls one's life, deeds, thoughts. The gospel is designed to convert the heart of man and thereby lead him to live a life that is good, beneficial, pleasing to God, without the defilements of sin.

"As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." (Proverbs 23:7). *"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."* (Matthew 12:34). *"A good man, out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things; and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things."* (Matthew 12:35). *"But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart, and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."* (Matthew 15:18,19). We see from these passages the necessity to have the heart under control. The gospel is the power by which this is accomplished.

Divine Power

Again, the gospel is divine power. It is the power of God. The power of Rome was in the sword. The power of Greece was her culture and intellectual attainments and art. The power of Jerusalem was her religious traditions. The power of Satan rests in his ability to tempt, seduce, deceive, mislead mankind through temptation. The power of God resides in the gospel of Christ to accomplish what is needful for mankind. God works through His Son, Jesus Christ, and the gospel of Christ.

God seeks to control and regulate the life of every person and their eventual destiny. He does not desire this simply for His own glory, but for the good and salvation of man whom He loves. The gospel of Christ is not simple "a" gospel, but it is "the gospel." The word "power" comes from a word that conveys the idea of a dynamo, dynamite. The gospel is God's dynamo, His strong right arm, the grand display of the grandest power ever known to man.

Of the gospel that he preached, Paul wrote, *"But I certify you,*

brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 1:11,12).

Unto Salvation

Furthermore, the gospel is a power that is for the benefit of mankind. It is God's power unto salvation. Some powers are destructive and harmful. Such is the power of storms, diseases; certainly the power of Satan is detrimental and intended for hurt. The gospel, however, is constructive, leading man upward, blessing him with regard to both body and spirit. The gospel is God's pattern and plan for liberating man from the bondage of sin. The gospel encourages what is the potential best in a person. It provides that great drawing power that takes man from his deeds of corruption and sinfulness into a life of nobility and purpose with purity, compassion, and goodness. The gospel is a power that makes a saint out of a sinner. It is the way of conversion that changes man from within and results in the change without.

The gospel of Christ raises man morally and mentally, enabling him to walk in a newness of life, able to bear good fruit in his life that is of both temporal and eternal profit to himself and others. The gospel provides man the standard by which he is to measure all things and know the difference between right and wrong. When one walks in the path of the gospel he becomes more and more like God would have him be. It is that power that delivers man from darkness into light, from condemnation into Christ where there is salvation.

It is the message of the gospel that causes people to obey the law even if they do not like the law. It urges people to develop their talents to the glory of God, treat their neighbors with dignity and respect, have compassion for the sick, down-trodden, homeless, elderly, all those in need. If one will compare those areas where the gospel has been preached and applied with the pagan and heathen areas of our world, he will see what the gospel does that is beneficial to mankind. What else raises mankind to the level where God created him, with purity, hope, and happiness?

Universal Power

Finally, the gospel is a universal power. It is needful for both

the Jew and the Gentile, and is without distinction as to race, color, social standing, or educational background. Men have many standards of measure by which they divide themselves one from the other. While there are many differences and some cannot be ignored, all have the opportunity to be blessed by the gospel of Christ with equal blessing. *"All have sinned..."* and all need to be saved. The wages of sin is the same for all; namely, spiritual death (Romans 6:23). *"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, and if ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise."* (Galatians 3:28,29).

Conditional

It is important that we know that the benefits of this divine, universal beneficent power are conditional. One part of the gospel consists of commands to be obeyed. Yes, there are the facts to be believed, and the promises and hopes to be enjoyed. Before we are the recipients of those blessings we must meet the condition of obeying the commands that change our relationship to God and make us His child *"in Christ."* *"Whosoever will may come,"* but they must come. God is no respecter of persons, but he is a respecter of character and obedience. The person who believes and obeys the command of repentance, confession, and baptism is the one who partakes of the gospel blessings of forgiveness of sins and fellowship with God. As he sojourns through life and allows the gospel to be his guide, he benefits from this great power.

It is sad but true, that even though this great power is before us and its blessings offered to us that many reject it in disobedience. Like the best of medicines, it will accomplish nothing for us until it is applied. If not believed and obeyed, this greatest power will lie dormant as far as we personally are concerned. God will, *"take vengeance on them that know not God and obey not the gospel."* (Second Thessalonians 1:8).

† † † † †

Jesus As High Priest

"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. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:14-16).

Jesus Christ serves in many roles. He is the Redeemer and Savior of man, the Preacher of salvation, the Prophet of truth, our example and guide. We want now to consider Him as our High Priest, as He is identified so frequently in the book of Hebrews.

The New Testament shows that every Christian is a priest. Christians are to be *"a holy priesthood."* (First Peter 2:5). They are called *"an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation."* (First Peter 2:9). John said in Revelation 1:6, *"He made us kings and priests unto God and His Father."* There is no special priesthood class as that which characterized the Jewish system whose priests came from the tribe of Levi.

Jesus is more than just a priest. He is our High Priest. *"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider the Apostles and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus."* (Hebrews 3:1).

Theme Of Hebrews

One of the prime purposes of the book of Hebrews was to prevent Jewish brethren from leaving the faith and returning to the Mosaic system that had been nailed to the cross. Those who read it would understand the nature of the Mosaic priesthood composed of the Levites. The Holy Spirit used that ancient priesthood to describe, compare, and contrast the High Priest, Jesus, with what had been formerly, showing in this way the superiority of the priesthood of Christ.

A logical question in the Jewish mind would be, "Why change the priesthood?" The priesthood was the basis for the old law inasmuch as the priests taught it, practiced it, led people in it, performed their duties accordingly. When there was a change of law, there was of necessity a change in the priesthood (Hebrews

7:11,12). The old law could not accomplish what the new covenant could accomplish. It was but a shadow of things to come (Hebrews 10:1). Jesus Christ is the mediator (Hebrews 9:15) of the new covenant. *"But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second."* (Hebrews 8:6,7).

Not just anyone would qualify for a priest under the Mosaic system. Certain qualifications were necessary before one could be made a high priest. Every high priest was taken from among men (Hebrews 5:1). The reason for choosing a man as high priest is because the priest must be one *"who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way, for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity."* (Hebrews 5:2). He needed to be one who could be sympathetic and understanding of the trials and difficulties of those he served.

These men were also to be the descendants of Aaron (Exodus 28:1-4). Aaron, like Moses, was of the tribe of Levi.

He Understands

Jesus Christ is a High Priest now that fills the role as One who is sympathetic and understanding of mankind. (Hebrews 5:5). He has been tried and tempted and lived as a human being here upon this earth in the midst of all the difficulties that mankind faces. This is one of the reasons He became flesh and assumed the form of man. The devil tempted Jesus, not only in the wilderness after His baptism (Matthew 4) but throughout His life on earth. Even though He was tempted, He sinned not (Hebrews 4:15; First Peter 2:21). Jesus knew success and He knew failure. He knew suffering, betrayal, poverty, slander, hunger, sorrow. *"Jesus wept."* (John 11:35). By His mission to this world of sin and sorrow He could know the plight of the one He came to serve and save.

The Levitical priests were to be called of God. None could take that service upon himself as his own will. Aaron was called to be the first high priest and that priesthood was to remain among his descendants. Imposters, ambitious ones, would rise up at times to assume that place, but one could not seize that office except it be God's will.

Christ was also appointed by the Father to be our High Priest.

Even the Son of God did not presumptuously assume this place. *"So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest, but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, today have I begotten thee."* (Hebrews 5:5). God, the Father, designated Jesus to this Priesthood. And Christ was faithful to him that appointed Him. (Hebrews 3:2).

As noted, the Israelite priests came from the tribe of Levi, but Jesus was not of that tribe. He was of the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:14). This is another reason there was a change in the priesthood. Christ is not a priest after the order of the Levites, but He is a priest after the order of one named Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:6; 6:20; 7:15,17). Now who was this man, Melchizedek, and in what way was Christ a priest after his order?

Like Melchizedek

We first read of Melchizedek in Genesis 14, when Abraham was returning from the rescue of Lot from the hands of certain invading kings. On his way from victory, Abraham met Melchizedek, called king of Salem and priest of the most high God. Notice he was king and priest, and he was king and priest at the same time.

Melchizedek blessed Abraham and Abraham gave tithes unto him. This event depicts the superiority of Melchizedek over Abraham, just as the priesthood of Jesus is superior to that of the descendants of Abraham; namely, the Levites. If the priesthood of Melchizedek was superior to the father of the priestly tribe, how much more is Jesus superior since He is a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

It is also said of Melchizedek that he was *"without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually."* (Hebrews 7:3). This man was a type of the Christ that was to come. These words denote the eternal nature of Christ and His Deity.

Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek and through Abraham his descendants paid tithes. The Levite Priests through Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:9,10). This shows the superiority of the one over the other.

The high priest under Moses' system had certain duties to perform. They offered sacrifices and gifts (Hebrews 8:3), and so should Christ have something to offer. What He offered was

Himself (Hebrews 7:27).

The tabernacle was divided into two parts, the Holy Place where all the priests did their labors, and the Most Holy Place, where only the high priest would go before God once a year to offer blood for the sins of the people. (Hebrews 9:6,7). These sacrifices would not take away sins (Hebrews 10:4), but had to be offered continually (Hebrews 7:27; 9:12; 10:11). But Christ offered the one sacrifice of Himself and this was sufficient (Hebrews 7:27; 9:12,26; 10:12,14). What the offerings under the old law did might be illustrated as rolling a snowball (year by year) toward the fire (the cross) and there (at the cross) the sins were melted away.

The Sacrifice

There is a distinctive difference in what the Levitical priest offered and what Christ offered in that the Levitical priest also offered for his own sins as well as the sins of the people (Hebrews 7:27). Christ, having no sin, offered no sacrifice for Himself.

Please take notice what Jesus has done. *“But Christ, being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building, neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”* Hebrews 9:11-14. Again, *“For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us, not yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with the blood of others. For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world. But now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”* (Hebrews 9:24-26). As High Priest, Jesus served as both the Priest and the Sacrifice. And His sacrifice was sufficient for all time, there being no need for a repetition of it. This is further explained in Hebrews 10:11-14,18.

Where He Is

Our High Priest is now on the right hand of God where He lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25). He is our Advocate, pleading our case before the Father (First John 2:21). He is the One mediator between God and man (First Timothy 2:5) and there is no access to the Father except through Him (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). We are not called upon to go through any human being as priest. We cannot go through any human being. We approach God through Christ. This practice of Romanism of praying through Mary or certain "saints" is born of apostasy and departure from the truth regarding the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Through Him we can come with boldness (meaning confidence) to God's throne of mercy and grace. We can obtain the help we need. (Hebrews 4:16).

Jesus, however, is High Priest only to those who come to Him. Have you believed in Christ, repented of your sins, confessed your faith in Him and been baptized into Christ? Until one does that, he has no priest nor an avenue of approach to God. Christ is the way; He is High Priest.

† † † † †

Acquaintance With Jehovah

"Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee." (Job 22:21).

The words of the text were spoken by the chief spokesman for the three "friends" who visited Job in the midst of his adversities. They contended that Job's distress was because of his sins. Job denied this, and we know that the friends were wrong in their conclusion because the book of Job opens with the declaration that Job was to be tested and tried. Furthermore, sin does not always produce personal and immediate suffering, nor is all suffering due to one's personal sins. However, the declaration by Eliphaz is true.

Acquaintance with God is essential to peace and salvation. To

enjoy the spiritual blessings that God offers, to have peace between oneself and His creator and Judge, to have the hope of heaven in one's heart, he must have an acquaintance with God. This acquaintance is more than just knowing something about God, and more than just a passing reference to knowing that God exists. It means more than being religious. Being religious is not always profitable because the religion may be that which has been designed by man rather than the heavenly Father. The only religion that is profitable unto man is that which comes from God. We would stress that the great need of mankind in every generation is to have the right kind of acquaintance with God.

Must Be Personal

The statement also shows that one must have an acquaintance with God for himself. Nobody can know God for you or by proxy. There is good reason to suspect that some think all will be well with them in the day of judgment because their wife, husband, children, parents, or friends knew the Lord. We are speaking of a personal acquaintance.

This acquaintance involves a personal transformation of character and a change of relationship spiritually with God. Being acquainted with God requires entrance into a new and blessed life here that leads to the joys hereafter. Again we stress that it is a personal and individual matter.

It is possible to have this acquaintance with God, as undeserving of it as we are. We can get to know God in such a way to know that we are His children and that we are saved. We can never know God to the extent that we completely understand all there is concerning Him, for then we would have to be Deity as is He. Jesus confidently affirmed that man can know God. *"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."* (John 17:3). The writer of Hebrews said, *"For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth to me."* (Hebrews 10:30). John wrote, *"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments."* (First John 2:3). While there are those who are planting doubt rather than faith and confidence in the minds of their fellowman, the Lord's Word teaches that we can know, and can know that we know. There is no need nor room for agnosticism in God's book.

Down through the ages good and righteous people have known God. They have known how desirable it is to be in

fellowship with God. Even as we can appreciate the value of being in association, fellowship, and acquaintance with the good and righteous people around us, how much better it is to enjoy this kind of relationship with Deity. There was a time, Paul said, when the Galatians did not know God, but later they did (Galatians 4:8). The world, in its sinful state, does not know God (First John 1:3).

How We Can Know God

We come to know God only through His Son, Jesus Christ. *"No man cometh unto the Father but by me,"* said Jesus (John 14:6). *"He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him."* (John 5:23). Jesus said, *"If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also, and from henceforth ye shall know him, and have seen him."* (John 14:7). To deny the Son is to deny the Father (First John 2:23). One must acknowledge the Son of God (First John 2:23). In Jesus Christ, *"God was manifest in the flesh."* (First Timothy 3:16).

Job 22:22 gives indication of how one comes to know God. *"Receive I pray thee, the law from his mouth, and lay up his words in thy heart."*

The acquaintance with God of which Eliphaz speaks reminds us of Romans 5:1 because both Paul and Eliphaz speak of peace. *"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* One result of acquaintance with God is peace with God. Man in his sins is alienated from God, without God, without hope (Ephesians 2:12). He needs to be reconciled to God, cease his warfare against the will of God and surrender his own will to the One who loves him. This reconciliation, making peace, is provided through the death of Christ on the cross (Ephesians 2:15,16).

Paul spoke of how Gentiles, in their paths of sin, *"know not God."* (First Thessalonians 4:5). He again warns that vengeance shall befall those who know not God and obey not the gospel (Second Thessalonians 1:8). Those who do not know God do not know the peace with God that we must have to enter into heaven. To live in the world of sin is to live at enmity with God (James 4:4).

Being at peace with God is not just a "cease fire" or a temporary truce. The more we come to know God, and this we can do as we grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord

through the partaking of His word, the more harmonious our lives will become to His direction and guidance. Two spirits become united. Our spirit becomes united with God. God loves us and we grow in love for God. Just as our acquaintance with people here on earth will lead us from one level to another in mutual love and esteem, so our continued association with God, fellowship of God, brings us into a lasting oneness with God until the way of God becomes the norm of life.

Blessings

Eliphaz said that acquaintance with God brings us good. Doubtless this was stated to Job in the context of deliverance from the ills that then did beset him. It was said in the mistaken belief that Job's troubles were due to Job's sin. Eliphaz was trying to point out to Job the avenue that was open to him to receive blessings rather than sufferings. Even though knowing God is no guarantee that hardship will end, that there will be no persecution and inconveniences, the statement is true with respect to the avenue of blessings, true blessings that matter.

What man sometimes classifies as good is not always good because it is damaging to our souls. Men may measure financial success as something good, but not necessarily so. Some lose their souls while seeking this gain (First Timothy 6:10). Generally, men think of ill health as all bad, but again we can be mistaken. Paul had his "*thorn in the flesh*," which was likely some physical malady and affliction. It was a blessing to him in keeping him humble. So it is with misfortune. It can be a blessing in disguise when it provokes us to consider what really matters in life. Worldly fame and fortune, pleasure and power, are fleeting at best. The wisdom of this world is not true wisdom. Only those treasures that are laid up in heaven are lasting.

Acquaintance with God brings us what is truly good, as God measures the good. Nothing is good that damages the soul and the possibility of going to heaven. That which is of true profit is that which helps us onward in the journey that eventually ends in the glories of God. This is the good that acquaintance with God produces.

Source Of Hope

Our text is one of the many reservoirs of hope and confidence that we find in the Scriptures. What surpasses in value having

peace with God? How can one place a price tag on being assured the truly good things, the things that benefit the spirit of man, now and forever? Both of these benefits come from acquaintance with God.

This verse is also an admonition to us. There is something to be done by each of us. The implication of the teaching is that acquaintance with God must come before the reception of the blessings and benefits. How do we come to know God? John wrote, *"And hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments."* (First John 3:2). Only by hearing God's Word, believing it and obeying it can one establish the acquaintance with God that he must have to be blessed. Here is the test by which we can know whether we are acquainted with God or not. Do we obey Him?

† † † † †

Forecast Of The Future

We have no intention of trying to be a foreteller of things about which we cannot know. Many have proven themselves false prophets by attempting to predict concerning the future. There are some things, however, that we can know because God has revealed them.

Man has a yearning to know what awaits him, but the old adage, "We never know what a day will bring forth," is certainly true. Christ taught us not to be anxious concerning the morrow, but that does not rule out making plans for the future. Christianity looks to the future. God expects us to consider the future and live today the best we can.

God evidently did not intend for us to know everything about the future. There are five events that will necessarily be in the future of everyone of us. The details of these events are lacking because they are not revealed, but we can be confident these five things are going to happen. There is no guesswork involved in it. It is certain.

Life

From this moment forward, we shall live a portion of life. For how long we cannot say, but whether it be in terms of moments, hours, days, years, or decades, we shall live life.

Why is that so important to remember? This life is our time to prepare for the life that is to come hereafter. Someone has coined the phrase, "Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people," taking a note from John 14:1-6. There is no second chance after this life. We either prepare now, while we live; or we will face God unprepared. Because life is before us, we should use it in the best fashion. It is not to be spent in indulgence, on self, wasted, or seeking the temporal and fleeting nothingness of this life to the neglect of the soul and the welfare of the soul in eternity.

Our lives should be lived for Christ. *"And that he died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."* (Second Corinthians 5:15).

Our lives are to be characterized by denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly and righteously and godly (Titus 2:12). We are to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1,2). For life to be lived for Christ it must be lived in Christ.

I cannot tell whether your life will be spent as a Christian or not. I can tell you that is a decision you must make, and your decision vitally affects the other four inescapable events awaiting you.

Death

Someday you will physically die. The body and the spirit shall be separated (James 2:26). Nobody escapes this separation (Hebrews 9:27). There is a time to be born and a time to die (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Even if we are alive when the Lord returns, we shall be changed and leave this body (First Corinthians 15:51).

Every person thinks at some time about when they will die, and how they will die, where they will be at that moment, who might be near them. Is the when, where, who, and how the most important matter to be considered when considering death? This awesome occasion will occur when Christ comes again (Second Peter 3:10). *"The day of the Lord will come."*

Resurrection

As we all shall die, we all shall experience the resurrection. Here we part from the materialist who thinks man is totally material and has no spirit. But the Bible clearly teaches that

there is more to man than just the body. And it teaches that death is not the end of our existence (First Thessalonians 4:16,17). Death is a doorway through which we pass from this life into another. All will be raised, both good and bad (John 5: 28,29). First Corinthians 15 is that great resurrection chapter. While there are many questions man can raise about death and the resurrection for which answers are not revealed, the resurrection from the dead is a matter that is clearly taught. We all have the need to prepare for it. It is in our future. We know not when, but the uncertainty of when in no way affects the certainty that it will be.

Judgment

Following life, death, the resurrection, there will be the judgment. *“And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.”* (Hebrews 9:27). *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”* (Second Corinthians 5:10). Does this reality in your future concern you?

Our salvation or condemnation will have already been determined before the judgment. That determination is made by the life we live and what we have done regarding Christ. The judgment is not a time of decision but a time of sentencing and separation for eternity (Matthew 25). At the judgment, the sheep and the goats shall forever be parted. The wheat and the chaff shall be separated. The faithful shall hear the sentence, *“Well done... Enter thou...”* The lost shall hear the sentence, *“Depart...”*

The judgment scene will be so awesome and serious. It will be a time of great rejoicing, but also a time of great sorrow and panic. Nothing else will have mattered if you are condemned and lost.

Eternity

Then there is eternity. Unlike time, eternity will have no end. It is limitless. This is beyond the ability of the mind to fully comprehend, since we live in an existence of “stops and starts.” Eternity, like God, is forever and ever.

We really will not “spend” eternity. When you spend something the implication is that the supply can be exhausted. There will be no exhaustion of eternity. We all will exist in eternity.

The Bible presents only two places of eternity, heaven and hell. And while the descriptions of the two are lacking in detail, we have enough information to easily determine which we prefer.

Heaven is pictured as a place of joy, peace, rest, the residence of God and all the blessed, no sorrow, no death, no decay, no yesterday, no morrow, but one eternal day. Nothing but what is good, pure, righteous, holy, and cleansed shall enter therein.

Hell is pictured as a place of outer darkness, weeping, the gnashing of teeth, crying, torment, punishment, second death, the lake of fire and brimstone. The same Bible that tells us about the glories of heaven also tells us of the horrors of hell. How foolish to be willing to believe the reality of one but not the other.

This is our future. These five events await us. From them there is no escape. Nothing in the Bible talks about "the rapture, The Great Tribulation, a thousand years reign of Christ on earth," and all that imaginative and speculative false theory of premillennialism. These five are coming.

What We Cannot Predict

We cannot predict whether you will go to heaven or hell. That is a decision you must make. We can be sure each will be in eternity at one place or the other. We decide the place ourselves.

We cannot predict whether you shall be saved or lost, but we know that you shall be judged, as will everyone else.

We cannot predict whether the tone of your sentence will be happy or sad, but we know it will be made.

We cannot predict whether you shall be raised to life or punishment, but we know all of us shall be raised.

We cannot predict when, where, or how you shall die. We know we all shall experience the separation of body and spirit.

We cannot predict whether you will live life as God wants it lived or not. That is a decision each one must make for himself or herself. The only way to live life pleasing to God is faithfulness in Christ. And the way you live will determine the happiness or the lack of it in the other inevitable events of the future before all people.

The future is ours to make of it what we will. What will it be with you?

† † † † †

Strange Reasoning

Many and varied have been the efforts of those who wish to use mechanical instruments of music in worship. Each of them have met with defeat because they are based on sand, removed from divine authority and reflect the feeble efforts of men to try to so change the revelation from God to somehow accomodate what they are determined to have.



JAMES W. BOYD

But a position taken by some in recent days seems to confirm the determination to use them regardless of evidence. Did you ever think some would start contending that there is no authority for congregational singing? Space prevents refutation of this foolishness just here, but there is a point that needs to be made. Suppose for a moment one could prove there is no authority for congregational singing which cannot be done. Has that proven use of mechanical instruments right? All you would have is two unauthorized practices rather than one. What ridiculous "reasoning" some produce!

What is as tragic as the foolishness of this is that some who profess to have respect for the Bible as the Word of God will fall in line and swallow such as that as proving instruments are allowed.

* * * * *

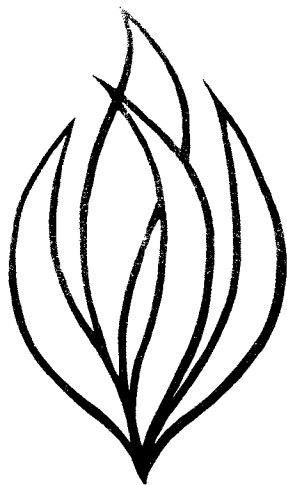
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).

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James Campbell Hagewood Back Cover

A Plea Not To Dance

The matter under discussion is so pressing that it deserves attention before the rising of another sun. Conscience, responsibility to God, to you, and to myself demands that the lesson be brought. It comes upon the heels of much prayer, serious thought and preparation. I bring it with a heavy heart because some of you are to be rebuked for what you have been doing. I seek only your spiritual good, your salvation, and the welfare of the church of the Lord at this place. We are stewards of God (First Corinthians 4:2), and this includes stewardship of the gospel. We must be loyal to it, dependable, standing with true allegiance in the truth, and firm in adherence to the teaching of the Bible. None of us would profess perfection, even though that is that for which we strive. Many of us fall and stumble, but we get up and press on. I am speaking to you about open, public, deliberate, repeated transgression that ought not be found in the life of one who professes to be faithful to God's truth.

Shall We Sin?

"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." (First John 3:9). This does not mean it is impossible for us to sin. It means it is inconsistent and incompatible for one who is born of God to continue in sinful ways. *"For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins."* (Hebrews 10:26). When we deliberately disobey God's teaching, to what else or to whom else can we turn and expect to be saved? We will have defied the only hope we have. Some sin in ignorance. Others sin because they are untaught. While this explains why some sin, it does not justify. But others sin knowingly, having been taught. They deliberately pursue sinful ways in spite of all. This is what is taking place among us, by young people, and condoned and even encouraged by some parents.

You may seek my removal from the pulpit after this lesson. I hope the truth is not that offensive to you. If that be the outcome, so be it. I cannot and will not shirk my God-given task as a preacher of the gospel and look away when my brethren

make our own way without God. *"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."* (Proverbs 14:12). Mankind, without the divine direction that God has provided, is like a flock of sheep, being scattered about, without a shepherd, subject to whatever might fall upon it as prey. In life people are often buffeted, not knowing how to go or which way, unable to make the decisions that must be made, with values twisted and distorted. Man is not able to set his own standards and be happy. He cannot even know by himself what is and is not of value. Without God's standards and values he cannot make intelligent and proper decisions. History is lined with the remains of those who have sought to live life without God and their story is failure upon failure in things that matter.

We have the need to know God and do good. Without God's revelation, and without Christ, His Son, we can neither know God or even know the difference between good and evil. Christ came to reveal God unto mankind. *"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."* (John 14:9). Christ not only came to teach us the way we should go, He is the way (John 14:6). Living a perfect life, He is the qualified One to direct mankind in the way that he should live. *"He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth."* (First Peter 2:22). We live properly only as we walk in the footsteps of the Son of God.

The Way Revealed

The way that the Lord walked, and the way we are to pursue, is revealed to us in God's Holy Word, the Bible. *"And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them."* (Isaiah 42:16). *"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want...He leadeth me beside the still waters...He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake."* (Psalm 23). *"Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord...Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my pathway...Order my steps in thy word..."* (Psalm 119:1,105,133). It is not that man cannot know the way he ought to go. God has given the instruction that we need. How tragic that so few have the hunger and thirst for His will and will learn and perform in life as God has intended. Can we expect the joys God has offered if we do not walk the way He has directed?

kingdom of God.” (Galatians 5:19-21). Let us understand with whom we are dealing. It is not man, but God. “But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 1:11,12).

To the Young And Those Older

I want to say to the young people that I have nothing but love in my heart for your souls. I have worked with you, taught you, been with you, are sympathetic toward you, know you and would go to any honorable length to save you. To the parents, I want to say that I respect your position as a parent, have admired you, been in your homes, enjoyed your hospitality, count you as friends and brethren. But when either you or your young defy the teaching of God, I must show my love for you by telling you of your transgressions so that you may make things right. When you disobey God, you are not being a loyal Christian.

I want to say to our elders, deacons, and Bible class teachers, more than others in the church, you set the standards and have the duty to uphold the truth of God. You cannot be unmindful or shirking in your responsibility. If you are, you become guilty of sin.

Many young people here, their parents, even families of elders and deacons, have sinned and have disobeyed God time and again by attending, partaking of, supporting, encouraging, condoning, allowing the modern dance. In doing this, you are like the world, not like Christ. The congregation is not untaught. We cannot plead we are not accountable. You have been begged and persuaded. The matter has been repeatedly explained. Yet, some wilfully, deliberately, defiantly stand against the teaching of God. You are revealing your worldliness and rebellion against the truth. The Word of God teaches that you have sinned in so doing. *“Thou art the man.”*

Whether one dances, plays in the dance band, decorates for the dance, promotes, sells tickets to it, or whatever, you are contributing to the encouragement of a sinful practice. Parents who encourage and condone it and do not restrain their children from it are likewise guilty of sin. A sizeable number of the members of this church have thereby defied the teaching of the Bible and have brought reproach on the cause of Christ, openly and publicly. Deep in your heart, you know what I am saying is

the truth.

Some Try To Justify It

We often seek defenses and excuses for doing what is wrong. Parents seek to justify their permissiveness toward their children. Some say, "It is no worse than other things, and far less evil than other things." Or, "I'm not the only one. Others are doing it." And so goes the efforts of those in sin to justify sinning. But, there is not one present or absent that can defend the practice. If you could, you would have tried long ago. There is no defense for going what the Bible condemns.

It is not my intention to give an extensive proof just now as to why dancing is wrong. That has been done over and over, publicly and privately, in classes, through tracts. I am pleading with you to obey God. When you dance, you do not reflect Christ, but reflect the devil. The question before us is this, "Are we convinced that God's way is best? Do we believe God's way is true and right? Are we willing to abide by His infallible word?" That is the sum and total of the entire matter!

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us." (Second Thessalonians 3:6).

If You Dance

Those who dance, and permit it, are not following the tradition or teaching given by the apostles. Here is your sin in a word - Disorderly. Paul said we are to withdraw from such if they will not turn from it. It matters not whether one be prominent, popular, powerful or whatever. God is no respecter of persons. Some congregations love the Lord's word enough to actually obey this apostolic direction. Does this church? The matter has been dodged, neglected, by-passed, covered up long enough. The way of sin is becoming the norm. We must decide whether God rules in this church or whether the social aspirations of a few who sin shall dominate.

Again we say, those of you who dance, support it, promote, condone it, you show disrespect to God and your brethren; you disgrace the church; you exhibit a bad example; your influence is detrimental; and you are undermining serious injunctions of God's word. Young people whose parents have disapproved of

the dance but who dance anyway can add to that their dishonor and disobedience to parents. We cannot overcome evil by partaking of it, ignoring it, compromising with it, but only by doing good (Romans 12:21). Paul tells us to be lights in the world (Philippians 2:15). How can one do that when he walks in the darkness of the world?

Who is at fault in this matter of wilfull and continued sinning by participating in the modern dances? The young people who attend are at fault. They know better. Parents who allow it are at fault. There are parents who stand against the truth, undermine what is taught at the assemblies when they get home. And then they wonder why their children do not have respect for the church or the Bible. Preachers in nearby churches who lie to you that it is all right and innocent are at fault. They are false teachers and deceivers, playing to the worldly minded that they might be popular. Elders are at fault who do not stand with truth, even if it is a matter that involves their own families. Certainly the pressure of the schools, the teachers, society, clubs, the social set who really are not too concerned with God's wishes anyway, all bear responsibility.

It is not difficult to assign and locate the blame. Correction must come from those who have violated God's teaching. *"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."* (Galatians 6:1). *"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins."* (James 5:19,20).

Give It Up

I come to admonish you as your brother in Christ. I entreat you with love for the truth and for your soul, give up this practice and persist in it no longer. Stand with God and those who are faithful to His Word. Repent of your sin and confess it, ask God to forgive you. Resist the temptations to ever be involved in it again. Do not wait until you see what others may or may not do. Do not let pride stand in your way. To one and all who have been in error in this matter, we make the fervent plea that you will turn today and sin no more in such fashion.

If you have a defense for dancing, bring it forward. We have asked for it openly and publicly repeatedly and no one even

tries to defend it, standing on the Word of God. Lacking Biblical defense, be honest with yourself, and with God and your brethren, and recognize it for the sin that it is, leave it off, and do not allow it to continue to be a part of your life.

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A Religious Error

Our lesson will teach a very unpopular religious truth. The religious world and the Bible are often at odds with each other. The Bible calls for much that the religious world rejects. The religious world condones, promotes, and supports much that the Bible opposes. Calling for a strict following of the Bible is often ridiculed. Many have such a strong desire for what they call “unity” and for what they say is “brotherliness” that they have allowed themselves to be forced into compromise of the truth of God in order to “get along” with other people. While there can be no objection to wanting to be “brotherly” we must consider the teaching of God more seriously than to set it aside to accomodate men. True and genuine unity cannot be founded on compromise with the truth. While we are all brothers physically (Acts 17:26), we are not all brothers spiritually. Not everyone is a spiritual child of God. Not even all who say they are God’s children are really in His spiritual family which is His church. (First Timothy 3:15).

There is tremendous pressure against adhering to the Bible. “Toleration” is the watchword. While we must be tolerant, does that mean that we must agree that everything is all right regardless of what the Word of God teaches? Is it evil and wicked judging to stand by the Bible and oppose what differs with it? Would we not be guilty of judging God if we dismissed His Word and decided “Everything is beautiful in its own way”?

What Freedom?

Freedom of religion does not mean freedom from religion, nor does it mean it makes no difference what one believes and does in religion. Religious freedom, probably the most wonderful freedom we enjoy in America, does not mean God

approves whatever anyone does religiously. Unity is not agreeing to disagree. Nor is it hate, bigotry, prejudice, etc., to hold to convictions that are founded on inspired revelation.

Christians should never be afraid to stand for the truth. We should rather be afraid to ever be ashamed of it, regardless of the consequences. It may cost us our friends, families, jobs, consideration of our fellowman, money, acceptance, etc. As Paul admonished, we must “...*stand fast in the faith*...” (First Corinthians 16:13). This leads us now to consider a very unpopular truth.

There are many who contend that all the religions serve a good cause and are all right before God. They place Mohammedism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, etc., all on the same plane. One is just as good as another in their view. These are simply different ways of approaching the Supreme Being, we are told.

Closely akin to that attitude is that which is held by most religious denominations; namely, that Christianity is the superior faith, possibly the only true faith, but one church is just as good as another. One faith, called Christian, is as beneficial as another, they contend. The Lord's church, according to this false belief, is supposed to be made of all the denominations combined.

There Is One

In sharp contrast to these views is the view that there is one faith that is acceptable before God, there is one church, and denominations have no place in this world by the authority of God but are man made religions that are not the church that was founded by Christ. It is not uncommon that those who hold this view are considered second class people, full of self-righteousness, hatred for others, narrow-minded, and all kinds of similarly ugly designations.

Who has the courage and integrity to inquire from the Scriptures and see what is taught therein? Are we honest enough to ask, “What does the Bible teach?” Are we honest enough to accept what the Bible teaches? Can we contend that we believe and follow the Bible if we defend what the Bible opposes, or attack what the Bible teaches? “*All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good*

works.” (Second Timothy 3:16,17). The Bible is inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all sufficient. Who will accept it?

The Bible teaches that there is only one church that belongs to God. While some scoff at this and say, “One church is as good as another and one faith is as good as another, and we have the right to choose the church of our choice,” the truth is that Christ established His church, is the head of one body which is the church, promises to save the church, has given teaching as to how to belong to His church, and never gives authority for man “choosing the church of his choice.”

Some will say that there is so much good in every church. We do not doubt that. This being true, we wonder why people do not join them all and get the good out of all of them. Remember, 98 % of rat poison is good food, but who wants to swallow it?

When people talk about “Christians in all the denominations” we are compelled to ask, “Where does the Bible teach anything whatever about denominations and God being pleased with their existence?” It does seem that those who condone and promise denominationalism and also say they believe the Bible is God’s Word ought to produce something from the Bible that is favorable to denominationalism, at least show where God has authorized such a system as denominationalism. The trouble with denominationalists is that they want to serve God their own way.

Honestly Wrong

To differ with people about denominationalism is not to challenge their honesty and integrity or sincerity. The Scriptures show how people can be honest and sincere and as wrong as can be. Consider Saul of Tarsus before he was converted. As for the church, what does the Bible teach? Are there many churches? Is one as good as another? Does God give man a choice of churches?

The word “*church*” means “the called out.” It has reference to people who have been called by the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14), out of darkness into light (Colossians 1:13; First Peter 2:9).

We read of the church universally, when in assembly and locally. When the Bible speaks of Christ as the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22,23), the term refers to the church

everywhere. We also read about local congregations, the church in Corinth, the church in Ephesus, etc., meaning local churches. In First Corinthians 11:18 we read of the church when assembled, such at the time for partaking of the Lord's Supper. The church is composed of the saved (Acts 2:47), and when the members of the church are scattered, the Scripture speaks of the church being scattered (Acts 8:4). A single member is not the church but is a member of the body, which is the church.

Christ promised to build His church (Matthew 16:16-18), and said He would build His church (singular number). There is one body (Ephesians 4:4) and the body is the church (Colossians 1:18). As husbands have but one wife so Christ has but one church, which is His bride (Ephesians 5:23ff).

The local churches were not denominations, but all believed the same doctrine, became members the same way, were to worship the same way, follow the same rule, be guided by the same instructions. Before going further, please consider such passages as First Corinthians 1:10-13; Philippians 3:15,16; First Timothy 1:3; 6:3; Galatians 1:8,9; John 17:20-23. After reading such passages, how could anyone contend for "unity in diversity" and that it matters little what one does, believes, teaches, and practices in religion? The idea that God is pleased regardless of what we think and do is diametrically opposite of Romans 12:16, *"Be of the same mind one toward another."* It contradicts the admonition, *"Be comforted, be of the same mind..."* second Corinthians 13:11). Philippians 4:2 reads, *"I exhort...Be of the same mind in the Lord."*

Division Is Wrong

The idea of division, varying doctrines and practices being acceptable in New Testament Christianity is absurd. Our Lord bought the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28), and it makes a difference whether you are in or out of His church. The difference is between salvation and condemnation. The teaching that one can be saved in all churches is blasphemous against Christ and His blood on the very face of it. The church is His kingdom (Matthew 16:16-18; Colossians 1:13), and it is His kingdom that shall be delivered to the Father when He comes again (First Corinthians 15:24). Those outside of His kingdom, the church, are not promised salvation, but are warned of condemnation.

The True Church

Someone comes forward to inquire, "Do you believe the church of Christ is the true church of the New Testament?" Well, if I did not, knowing what the Bible teaches about being in His church, I would not be a member of anything else. And if I did not believe I was in the church revealed in the Bible, I would be busy finding it. When I can read of the church in the Bible, and believe what those Christians believed, practice what they practiced, worship like they worshipped, then I am what they were, Christians, no more or less, in the kingdom and a member of the body, the church that belongs to Christ.

All people must do is to take the Bible and follow it and leave off the theologies, disciplines, manuals, catechisms, human traditions, innovations, additions, subtractions of which men have been guilty of doing with God's revelation about the church, and the church of the Bible is reproduced. It would not be possible to produce a denomination when you sow only the "*seed of the kingdom, which is the word of God.*" (Luke 8:11). One must sow the tares of human doctrines to produce a denomination.

Christ is the only way to God (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). This means other religions are vain and false. Christ has but one church. If a church is a denomination, it is not the church of Christ. If it is the church of Christ, it is not a denomination. Nowhere are we taught one church is as good as another, choose your own church, you can be saved in any or all of them, or even one of them if you see fit. That is Satanic and deceptive false doctrine.

The truth is, Christ has one church, and we must be members of it.

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I Hope It Continues

My first meetings this year have been encouraging. As much as anything else there has seemed to exist among faithful brethren an air of optimism. For several years the onslaught of liberalism left a numbing effect. The problem is still very much with us and serious. But more and more brethren are recognizing it and dealing with it. For this we are encouraged. JB

The Children Of Abraham

“But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith that should afterward be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized unto Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male or female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:23-29).

In the Bible you read of many people who are called the children of Abraham, Abraham’s seed, Abraham as their father. You hear messages where Christians are called Abraham’s children, and this is true. This is what our passage teaches. We need to understand in what sense Christians are the children of Abraham. What does being a child of Abraham really mean? What does this say about our relationship to God? Why are Christians called children of Abraham?

The Patriarch

Abraham, one of the better known Biblical characters of the Old Testament, is first mentioned in Genesis when he was called to leave his home in Ur of Chaldee to go into a place where God directed him. God made great promises of this man; such as, he would be the father of a great nation, his descendants would be as numerous as the sands of the sea and the stars of the heavens, God would bless those that blessed him and curse those that cursed him, his people would have a land for their own so long as they were faithful to God, and the greatest promise of all, *“and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed...”* (Genesis 22:18). Paul identified that “seed” as Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:16).

Abraham is often called the father of the faithful, and James identified him as a friend of God (James 2:23).

Abraham has children both physically and spiritually. Physically, Isaac was his descendant, the promised son born unto Sarah in their old age. Before him was Ishmael, born unto

Sarah's handmaid, Hagar. After the death of Sarah, Abraham had more children by Keturah. The Israelite nation, later known as the Jewish nation, are all physical descendants of Abraham. Likewise, through Ishmael, and Esau, the Arab world looks to Abraham as their physical ancestor. It is said of Abraham. "*I have made thee a father of many nations.*" (Romans 4:17).

Spiritually, the children of Abraham are those who make up the family of God. For a number of centuries, the Israelite people were God's chosen nation by virtue of their descendancy from Abraham, the nation through which the Messiah of all mankind was to come. The Jews placed such tremendous importance on being a descendent of Abraham as the mark of their spiritual acceptance. The fact that Jesus preached salvation to all men, not just to the Jews exclusively, was what created such antagonism against him by the Jewish leaders.

John's Message

John the Baptist, while preparing the way for the coming of the Lord had taught, "*But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruit meet for repentance, and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto abraham.*" (Matthew 3:7-10). He taught the coming end of the special status of the Jews and their special privileges and relationship with God because Christ, the promised Savior of all mankind, had come. Spiritual acceptance would no longer be based on one's ancestry but one's response to this Savior. "...*For they are not all Israel which are of Israel, neither because they are the children of Abraham, are they all children: but in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted for seed.*" (Romans 9:6-8). Just because one could point to Abraham as his fleshly foreparent would not suffice to identify him as one of God's family anymore.

The blessings of God would rest upon those of any nation, tribe, color, tongue, background, ancestry, if they would come to God through Christ. "*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). Therefore, the children of Abraham, those who are the beneficiaries of God's promises, are those who belong to Christ. Our text plainly states that child of God is a child of Abraham, and we are children of Abraham if we belong to Christ. Therefore, if one is out of Christ, he is not a child of Abraham, spiritually speaking, and not a child of God, spiritually speaking. That relationship does not exist except for those who belong to Christ.

Birth / Adoption

How do people become members of their families? One, it is by birth. This is obvious and needs no further comment. Another way is by adoption, a legal process whereby a child becomes the child of adoptive parents. The New Testament pictures people becoming spiritually the children of God by using both illustrations. It is not that people become children of God two ways, but that the one way is illustrated both ways.

Jesus taught the new birth (John 3). We must be born again. We enter into a newness of life, new creatures in Christ (Romans 6:3,4; Second Corinthians 5:17). We are born into the family of God by this spiritual new birth.

Paul speaks of people being adopted, receiving the adoption of sons, becoming children of God through Christ (Galatians 4:5; Romans 8:15ff). Once belonging to Satan because of sin, Christians are adopted by the Lord. *"Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham."* (Galatians 3:7). By the faith of Christ, and faith in Christ, a faith that renders obedience to Christ, we become children of Abraham, hence, children of God, spiritually. As Israel was once the children of God because they were of the descendants of Abraham, so we are the children of God, called children of Abraham, through the faith of Christ.

It is not surprising that faith is involved in becoming children of Abraham, seeing he was a man of faith, an example of faith, one who acted on his faith, and whose life emphasized faith. It can be expected that the child will be like the parent. Jesus said of some in His day on earth, *"I know that ye are Abraham's seed, but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father, and ye so that which ye have seen with your father. They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of*

Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God, this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father. Then saith they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own, for he is a liar, and the father of it.” (John 8:37-44).

Devil's Children

As children of the devil will behave like the devil, children of God will behave as God directs. The children of Abraham will be people of faith as was Abraham. Abraham was justified by faith (Galatians 3:6; Romans 4:3; Genesis 15:6). Nothing in the Bible teaches he was justified by faith alone, but he was justified by faith.

When was Abraham justified by faith? James 2:21-24 makes it plain. Paul and James refer to the same Old Testament passage. One teaches that Abraham was justified by faith and the other teaches that Abraham was justified by works of obedience. There is no conflict whatever. Works of obedience made the faith of Abraham perfect, whole, mature, complete. Without his works of obedience his faith would have been a dead and useless faith. His faith acted. Hebrews 11:8 says Abraham by faith obeyed. Hebrews 11:17 says by faith he offered. His faith justified him when it led him to do what God commanded to be done. Faith plus works saved Abraham.

Romans 5:1 teaches that we are justified “*by faith,*” as was Abraham. When does our faith justify us? When do we become the children of Abraham? Our text told us that we are children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. Then it explains just when that faith made us a child of God. “*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*” Notice that it was when we acted on our faith like Abrahams. Paul says that those who “*have been*” baptized into Christ “*are*” the children of God. It stands therefore that those who have not been are not. We are because we have been. We are not if we have not been. Not until our faith has led us to obey the Lord’s command

to be baptized has our faith made us a child of God.

Circumcision

The children of Abraham in a fleshly sense were circumcised. This was a token of the covenant between God and Abram (Genesis 17:10). Circumcision nor uncircumcision availeth anything in Christ as far as our spiritual welfare is concerned (Galatians 5:5,6). What is important is the circumcision of the heart; that is, the heart brought into covenant relationship with God. What is the circumcision of the heart? This is a figurative expression denoting that we also are in covenant relationship as was Abram. *"For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God."* (Romans 2:28,29). Paul told his Christian brethren in Philippians 3:3, *"For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."* Again, *"In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ, buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead."* (Colossians 2:11,12). The "circumcision" of the heart is an operation of God. It is not fleshly, but spiritual. It is not of the body, but the heart. It occurs when we are buried in baptism into Christ.

As Abraham's children, we should walk in steps of faithfulness all the days of our lives as did he. He is called *"faithful Abraham."* (Galatians 3:9). Abraham was not perfect, but he did "keep on keeping on." That is what God expects of those who are children of Abraham.

"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made." (Galatians 3:16). The promises were through his seed, which is Christ. Through Christ, we are also of the seed of Abraham. We can be partakers of God's promises in Christ.

Abraham was called from Chaldee (Genesis 12). He obeyed: He built an altar of worship in Hebron (Genesis 13). He paid tithes to Melchizedek (Genesis 14). Genesis 15 tells us he believed in the Lord and it was counted unto him for righteousness. It was *"because that Abraham obeyed my voice and kept by charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my*

laws,” (Genesis 26:5) that God saved Abraham by faith. His obedience to God in offering Isaac was an act of obedient faith. By such he obtained God’s promises, and so with us. If we would be children of Abraham, God’s people, among the saved and those of promise, we must belong to Christ (Galatians 3:29).

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To Believe And Do

Revelation 21:1-7 gives us a picture of the church and a forecast of heaven. Most of us have that great desire to enter heaven. We expect to be saved eternally, but not all who want to go to heaven will go. Added to this, there are many who know not the truth who will miss heaven also.

Regarding those who want to go to heaven but have not obeyed the gospel, or regarding those who have never heard the way of salvation, people are heard to say, “Maybe God will provide a way for them to be saved anyway.” There is no other way than Christ (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). This is the reason it is urgent that the gospel be spread throughout the world.

Let us illustrate this way. There are many “wonder medicines” in existence that can cure diseases that would otherwise prove fatal. If those who are sick do not know of the medicine, or refuse to take it, they cannot expect to receive the benefits from it. So it is with the gospel of Christ prescribed by the Great Physician to heal our souls from sin.

Wrong Belief

People may be lost because they believe the wrong things. “*Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.*” (John 8:24). One may be honest and sincere in what he believes, but he may not believe what he must believe in order to be saved. If one is taught wrong, he will believe what is wrong. It matters what a person believes.

Because what we believe is important, we urge us all to “*search the Scriptures daily*” and learn what the will of God is.

This is why we are to study the Word of God. (Second Timothy 2:15).

Do Wrong

Many may be lost because they are doing the wrong things. Revelation 21:8 condemns a variety of sins, as other passages do, and concludes how those who are guilty of such things *“shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”*

It matters what you do. When people are sinning, they cannot expect salvation. Following the ways and doctrines of men rather than the more excellent way that God has designed and delivered will cause one to be excluded from the glories of heaven. Cain sacrificed in error. Nadab and Abihu worshipped God but not according to the way God authorized (Leviticus 10:1,2). Annanias and Saphirra did not follow God’s plan (Acts 5). When we do those things that are wrong, we have no promise of heaven, but only the stern and awesome warning of hell.

People must learn not to go beyond what the doctrine of Christ teaches (Second John 9-11). Paul wrote, *“Learn not to go beyond the things which are written...”* (First Corinthians 4:6). Galatians 5:19-21 warns against doing certain things and those that do them *“shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”*

People can also be lost eternally because they fail to believe and do the right things. Believing wrong, doing wrong, will seal our doom. Salvation is more than simply refraining from the evil. It also involves believing and doing what is right. In other words, we can “back into hell” by doing nothing, being passive when we ought to be active, and being idle when we ought to be working.

The doctrine of salvation by “faith only” is false to the core. There is that which must be done in order to be saved. We would remind you of the teaching in Matthew 25 and the parable of the ten virgins, five of whom made adequate preparations, but five who did not do what they ought to have done.

Judgment

We would read further and note the judgment scene and those who were received and those who were rejected. The

virgins, as well as those later received in the chapter, were not accused of doing evil. There was no charge of sin. They were excluded because of their failure to do what they ought to have done. Jesus teaches there is a right to do as well as a wrong not to do in service to God.

"To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." (James 4:17). *"Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deluding your own selves."* (James 1:22). Matthew 7:19-27 gives great emphasis to not only hearing the will of the Lord, but also doing it. Those that hear and refuse to do are branded as foolish as the man that builds his house on sand. It is those who hear and do that are like the man who built his house on the rock and it was able to stand against the elements.

Our lesson is that there are those things that we must believe and do in order to get to heaven. We realize that even when we do what we are commanded to do we are not earning salvation. To merit a home in heaven is beyond our ability. Only through forgiveness of our sins by the blood of Christ can we enter therein. The merit of man's salvation is Christ, not man. Nonetheless, there are conditions we must meet or we shall remain lost. Salvation is a gift but a gift given on certain terms.

What To Do

The message that the world must hear and know is what one must do to be saved. Having learned of God's grace and mercy, and the demonstration of His graciousness and merciful kindness by the sending of His only begotten Son to live, die, and be raised again, taking note that we are saved by the blood of Christ, we must believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. *"Without faith it is impossible to be pleasing unto him..."* (Hebrews 11:6). *"Saved by faith"* is a paramount theme of the New Testament. Unless we place our trust, confidence and faith in Christ, we have closed the only door that God has provided through whom we can be saved. *"He that believeth not shall be damned."* (Mark 16:16).

We are to also submit our own will to Him, turn from the wickedness in our heart and behavior, turning to the Lord, in repentance. *"Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."* (Luke 13:3,5). Paul said that God *"now commandeth all men everywhere to repent."* (Acts 17:30).

Repentance is a change of heart, provoked by godly sorrow and the righteousness of God, that results in a change of

direction and manner of living. Repentance is not merely sorrow, nor is the reformation of the pattern of life to be confused with repentance. Reformation is the result of repentance. When one has genuinely repented, changed His mind about sin, about Christ, about the truth, he will then do whatever the Lord directs him to do to be saved.

One must confess his faith in Christ with his mouth (Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10). Like the Ethiopian in Acts 8, we ought never be ashamed to acknowledge, "*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.*" (Acts 8:37).

One must be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), into Christ (Galatians 3:27), for Jesus made this a condition of salvation (Mark 16:16). Annanias told Saul, "*And now why tarriest thou, Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*" (Acts 22:16).

In Matthew 22, Jesus told the parable of a king who had prepared a great feast and invited many. Some rejected the invitation, some attended. There came one who was not properly prepared. He was not wearing the wedding garment. He had not made adequate preparation. His wrong was that he failed to do what was right, and he was cast out into darkness where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Desire Is Not Enough

The lesson is too plain to miss. Just wanting to be saved is not enough. Just doing some things is not sufficient. We must believe and do what the Lord of all has instructed.

The question before us is simply this: "When we stand before God in judgment, will we have our garment of obedience to His commands or will we, like the unprepared man, be cast away because we failed to believe and do what God has taught is necessary?" Better we answer that question now, in this life, while there is time and opportunity to get right, than to wait until we face God and hear our doom because we neglected such an important matter?

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Our Mailing Address

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Man's Changeless Needs

We are very much aware that we live in a rapidly changing world. This has always been the case, but our age has seen changes of greater impact and speed than any age of human history. We also must be aware that there are some things that do not change. Among those things are the basic needs of mankind.

We deem it profitable as well as interesting to consider what man's basic and fundamental need are. Let us imagine a world blown apart by a super explosion that left but a few people to survive. No longer did they have their houses, their cars, their televisions, their wrist watch or jewelry. All the many material possessions that we see around us ceased to exist. Yet, the human family could survive if we had his basic needs.

Even though our world has become tremendously complicated because of the many things around us, the ultimate requirements of life remain relatively simple. The real necessities have not changed since Adam. Many refinements have been added and we have multiplied our wants until the list is extensive. It takes so much of our time, energy, thought to continue to supply the comforts, luxuries, and the many other things upon which we have allowed ourselves to become dependent. It is good to strip away all these surface matters and think about the basic needs.

Physical Needs

Man has certain physical needs for the sustenance of life. He must have food, shelter, clothing, and not much more. We are not suggesting that we do away with everything else that makes life enjoyable, but we are trying to focus on what is demanded. Our lives do not depend on all the added things that we have accumulated. Many problems of life arise from our excessive wants for many things. People even fight, hate, gouge, push, exploit, take advantage, cheat, kill, whatever they feel is needful in order to possess material things. By this we show we do not understand that keeping our wants few and simple would be more in accord with our needs. People like Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, etc. had much the same needs that we do today. Basically there is no difference. We may have

different modes of transportation, wear different types of garments, sleep in a different design of house, etc., but we still have the same needs that they had.

There are a number of Biblical passages that teach us the futility of seeking happiness and satisfaction by having things. *"Naked came I out of my mother's womb and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."* (Job 1:21). *"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can carry nothing out. Having food and raiment, let us therewith be content."* (First Timothy 6:6-8). *"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."* (Philippians 4:11,12). *"Take heed and beware of covetousness: for man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."* (Luke 12:15). All of these passages plead that we not overemphasize the material and physical things of life.

The beauty and wonder of it all is that God knows we have need of certain physical things and has promised us if we will put His kingdom and His righteousness first in life we shall be provided what we really need (Matthew 6:33). Man has lungs and God provides air. Man has hunger and God provides plants and animals from which clothing can be made. Man needs warmth and God provides the sun, the fuels, with which to build shelter and produce heat. Before man was created, God had already created a world that would provide for he needs of mankind. These things have not changed from the beginning of time. Man is learning more and more how to use what God has given and enhances his state in life by their use.

Not By Bread Alone

Man shall not live by bread alone. Man is more than a physical being. He is also a spiritual creature. He is created in the spiritual image of God. Man is soul and spirit as well as body. Many fail to realize this about themselves and others and therefore fail to provide for this part of man and this failure leaves them so incomplete.

Being a spiritual creature, mankind needs fellowship with God, His Creator. Having sinned, mankind needs to be

redeemed from the onslaughts of sin. *"All have sinned..."* (Romans 3:23), and are subject to the wages of sin (Romans 6:23). Our sins separate us from our Creator and deprive us of the needed fellowship with God (Isaiah 59:1,2). If only all mankind could realize his lost and condemned condition, then the task of persuading people to come to God would be greatly simplified. So many either deny or ignore the fact that we are spirits and shall continue to exist after physical death.

God Provides

God has provided for our spiritual needs. *"She shall bring forth a son and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for it is he that shall save his people from their sins."* (Matthew 1:21). *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."* (John 3:16). Jesus Christ is God's provision for the spiritual blessings that man must have. All such blessings are found in the relationship with God that is called *"in Christ."* (Ephesians 1:3).

When Jesus taught the woman at Jacob's well (John 4), it was obvious that she was concentrating on the physical need of water. She was unsaved, unbelieving, unblessed, in spiritual need. Christ told her about another water, the water of eternal life. While the woman was like so many today that put their emphasis only on the physical, Jesus pointed out her spiritual need and that He was the One through whom that need could and would be supplied. He is the water of life.

One basic reason why so many people are groping about in life with such frustration, hopelessness, aimlessness, seeking to get something out of life but missing the mark is because they have not accepted the fact that man is spirit, man has spiritual needs, God has supplied those needs and His supply is Jesus Christ. Only Christ can give unto man what he must have to be complete and fulfilled. One can heap to himself a wealth and abundance of the material and be miserable and lacking. The one who has partaken of the spiritual bread of Christ, regardless of physical circumstances, he has learned contentment, peace, value, and has the hope of an eternal life with God.

Mankind needs guidance in life. *"It is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps."* (Jeremiah 10:23). Here is where many of us make a colossal blunder. We get the idea that we can

something wrong here

are sinning and bringing reproach on the cause of Christ that we all are supposed to uphold together.

Relevant Scriptures

"Beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." (Romans 12:1,2). *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."* (First John 2:15-17). The sinful things of the world are off-limits to the child of God. *"Come ye out from among them..."* is the Biblical admonition (Second Corinthians 6:17). Too many of this church have been repeatedly and deliberately following the ways of the world, bringing reproach on the church, making mockery of the teaching of God. If Christian people do not wish to live by the Bible, how do you expect anybody to persuade others to go that way? There are those who do not worship on Sunday, as we do, who know better than to do what some of you are doing. They see the inconsistency and the influence of gospel preaching to save their souls has no effect. We must realize that there is more to Christianity than going to services, eating the Lord's Supper, giving a few dollars and bowing in prayer. Now, as always, God requires obedient living in order for worship to be acceptable. *"For I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."* (Hosea 6:6). *"Behold to obey is better than sacrifice."* (First Samuel 15:22). We make our worship vain when we defy God Monday through Saturday and think coming to worship on Sunday is going to make everything all right with God.

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envying, murders, drunkenness, revelings, and such like, of the which I tell you before, as I have told you in times past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the

We have our physical and spiritual needs. It has been essentially the same for all people in every generation. In a world where changes are so fast, when what was new yesterday is obsolete today, when what was new today is antiquated by tomorrow, we need to know that some things remain constant and do not change. We also need to know that the supply of our basic needs has not changed. "*Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever.* ' (Hebrews 13:8). When we hold fast to Christ, we can either ride out the turbulent changes or take advantage of them for good. Without the Lord, we are sailing on a stormy sea, without compass or hope of reaching a happy destination

† † † † †

Why Cannot People Be Honest?

We have mentioned several times what we perceive to be a major flaw in the characters of so many people, and that is basic, fundamental honesty and the will to tell the truth. This manifestation of the work of the devil is evident in quarters one would never expect. It may be expected among the people of the world who admit they care nothing for the Lord. It might even be expected among religious people who have adopted the idea that they are at liberty to do what they like rather than what the Lord commands.

But it is distressing to see, time after time, brethren who will lie. Some will lie about what somebody said. Some will lie in their business dealings. Some lie to cover their sins rather than clean up their sins. This is not the conduct expected of children of God. Yet, among those who profess to be members of the Lord's church this is seen all too often.

This dishonesty and lying is not only among the membership generally, but among elderships and preachers. Having encountered liberals lately in matters pertaining to doctrine and false accusations, the way they will dodge and squirm rather than tell the truth is pathetic. Do they not realize the fate of liars? (Revelation 21:8). How long do they think they can follow that path of wickedness and still be considered faithful children of God? They talk love, but are the most viciously dishonest people with whom it has been our misfortune to deal. In the words of James, "*My brethren, these things ought not so to be.*"

James Campbell Hagewood



James was born March 15, 1986 to Amy and Lowell Hagewood. Amy is our daughter and this makes the young James another grandchild for Rosalyn and I. He is also the first grandchild for Jean Hagewood, Lowell's mother.

Weighing in at eight pounds and one ounce, he has had the constant attention of his grandmothers from the day he came home. First one then the other was with him under the guise of assisting Amy.

We now have two sweet granddaughters and two fine grandsons. This sure makes us proud and thankful, not only for each of them, but for the wonderful Christian parents our grandchildren have.

James was named after his maternal grandfather and his paternal great grandfather, Campbell Jenkins. With such a fine boy to love and rear, we are most happy for Amy and Lowell.

* * * * *

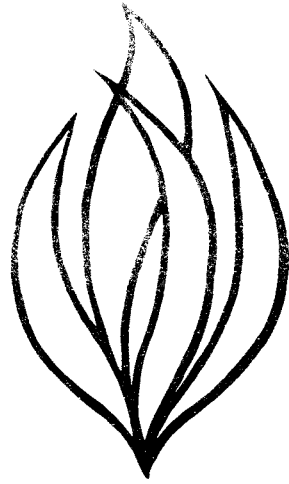
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).



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Christian Optimism

“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” (Genesis 6:5). This is a description of the world just prior to the destruction of the world by the flood at the time of Noah. The extent of wickedness is beyond imagination. We may feel that the world is almost like that now, and doubtless such is true of some quarters of it, but every age considers its problems and woes worse than any other. There are many good and moral people in the world, plus many true New Testament Christians as well. But we do not minimize the evil, the injustices, the degeneracy that abounds in the world.

Sin In The World

It is true that evil dominates our world, and this is depressive. Crime grows faster than the population. There are more and more robberies, murders, rapes, seditions, riots, abuses from year to year. We are witnessing the deterioration of the God-given plan for the home. We suffer the highest divorce rate in the world. Our papers, television, and magazines overflow with violence, moral decay, wars, and corruption. They report it, promote it, and glamorize it.

The holy things of God are disrespected, such as the church, the gospel, authority, morality, even the dignity and sacredness of human life. The nation is almost submerged beneath materialism, spiritual poverty, evolution, and atheism, with its three accompanying “a’s” of alcohol, adultery, and abortion.

Wickedness in high places is commonplace. The influence of powerful people only contributes to a worsening situation. And the forces that are trying to hold back the tide of error seem so weak and inadequate, confused, divided, and ineffective. On the surface, there seems to be little about which to be optimistic. Someone has suggested that those who are optimistic are just not really paying attention.

Yet, the Scriptures teach the Christian to fear not, be not anxious, be of good cheer, and that godliness with contentment is great gain. The Christian does not look on this world as do others. He knows this world is not his home, but only a temporary dwelling place. One may ask, “Why be cheerful?”

Why be optimistic? What reason is there to be contented and happy?" Even as the question is asked, it is apparent that many have found refuge, peace, and contentment in the midst of the storms of life. Many are smiling amidst the gloom. Some are not overwhelmed. Why is that?

The Christian Is Different

The Christian remains cheerful and optimistic, not because he lives a life of indifferent hilarity or because he is on some kind of psychological high that ignores reality. He does not content being a Christian "fun" when he and others suffer because of what they believe and do. He knows he has a mission in life, a reason for living, a goal to reach, a hope in his heart, and a cause for which to stand.

So many have never learned what life is nor the reason for it. They grope about seeking power, pleasure, popularity, doing all sorts of weird and bazaar things trying to add some meaning to their existence in ways that have never brought man the satisfaction of his needs and desires. In contrast to those poor and deluded souls, the Christian is fortunate to have heard, learned, and accepted the more excellent way that God has provided, and therefore has hope, a basic element in Christian character. Hope is a part of the armor of God (First Thessalonians 5:8), the *"anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast,"* (Hebrews 6:19). We are saved by hope (Romans 8:24), because our hope keeps us on the right path, renews our determination, and prevents us from being overturned even though tossed about by waves of distresses in life. The Psalmist said, *"Hope thou in God."* (Psalm 42:5). Our hope is stayed on God through His Son, Jesus Christ, who is the giver of hope. The Christians hope is not founded on fantasy and escapism, nor wishful thinking and lack of realism, but is solidly grounded and undergirded by the revelation from God, the Bible.

Our Hope

Our hope springs from the assurance and conviction that good will ultimately triumph over evil. There is reason for this conviction. We do not ignore, belittle, or minimize the world's disorders. While we are not blinded to the present and terrible realities, neither are we blinded by them and unable to see the eternal realities that have been assured us by the Creator of all

things.

Our Victory

We are aware that the victory over evil has its costs. We are aware that Christ has made it possible for us to be victorious. *"But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."* (First Corinthians 15:57). We are aware that there is a high cost for us to pay, but we are willing and ready to pay that cost. We concede that things are not as they ought to be. In fact, when we see what God says man should be, we are more aware than most that things are not as they ought to be. We are determined to be as we ought to be regardless of the rest of the world. We are fully conscious that this life is not all there is to our existence.

Paul wrote great words of faith and hope when he said, *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."* (Romans 8:28). This does not teach that everything that happens is good for us. Neither does it teach that God makes everything happen. The *"things"* that God has provided refers to the system of salvation through Christ, and those things work for man's good. We benefit from these things if we love God and respond to His call, a call that comes through the gospel (Second Thessalonians 2:14). God has worked out certain things that are for man's good. He has provided His Son and the way of forgiveness of sins that leads to heaven. These things are for our good. The Christian serves God in the spirit of the words of Isaiah 26:3, *"The Lord will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth Thee."* Therefore, our hope is not just wishful thinking or refusing to face reality. Rather we face reality with confidence even in the evil world knowing that God's will shall prevail.

The book of Revelation sends us the message of victory to those who are faithful *"in the Lord."* Being faithful means we can and will overcome.

Faithfulness

There are four legs to our table of optimism. One, the faithfulness of God. *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man. But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the*

temptation also make a way of escape that ye may be able to bear it.” (First Corinthians 10:13). This tells us that there is nothing that shall happen this day that God and I together cannot handle.” God is faithful, reliable, dependable. We can count on God. He is our strength, our shield, the same yesterday, today, and forever. *“But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you and keep you from evil.”* (Second Thessalonians 3:3). *“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering, for he is faithful that promised.”* (Hebrews 10:23). This does not mean we shall not face hardships, but it means we shall be victorious over them if we remain faithful to the Faithful One.

Optimism

Two, Jesus Christ is the perfect example of optimism. Consider how optimistic He was when He came into an evil world to save the world. He demonstrated love, truth, and honor in the midst of hate, error, and every form of dishonorable conduct and thought. By His obedience to the Father’s will, He showed man light and life. He lived perfectly before God, a sinless life even though sin and temptation was all around Him.

Becoming our Savior by His death on the cross, He showed His optimism in giving the great commission, in offering salvation, even in rising from the dead, giving man a guide for life.

Prayer

A third leg of the optimism of the Christian is the avenue of prayer. *“Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.”* (Philippians 4:6). *“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* (Hebrews 4:15,16). *“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us, and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.”* (First John 5:14,15).

Some would reduce prayer to a mere form and ritual. Others

attribute the power of prayer to nothing more than a psychological exercise. But James tells us, "*the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*" (James 5:16). As Tennyson wrote, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of."

This avenue of approach is open to the children of God. God will hear us and answer our prayers according to His will, according to His infinite wisdom as to what is best for us. Knowing this, we can be optimistic.

Sowing/Reaping

Then, four, there is the unrepealable law of sowing and reaping in Galatians 6:7,8. We usually consider this law as a warning to us, and it is. "*For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.*"

This law is a promise of good things. "*But he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.*" In other words, God promises us, that if we live according to His direction, we shall be blessed, not only in this life, but in the next as well. For this reason we can place confidence in Paul's very next statement. "*And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*" (Galatians 6:9). Paul wrote, and stressed the value of serving God in First Corinthians 15:58, right after he noted that our victory is in Christ. "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*"

There is a story told about a small lad who was on a sailing ship many years ago that was overtaken in a terrible storm at sea. All the passengers were very afraid and feared for their lives, except this lad. He was calm and serene. It was not because he was unaware of the storm, nor unconcerned about the danger. When he was asked why he was calm even under such trying circumstances, he replied, "My father is the captain of the ship." His serenity was due to his confidence in his father who controlled the ship. And our heavenly Father controls things, too.

A small boy and his father were walking home and the night was very dark. The small boy asked his father, "Daddy, are you afraid?" And the father answered, "No, son, not at all." Then the boy spoke with greater confidence, "I'm not afraid either." So it is with us, if we be faithful Christians. This is our Father's

world. So long as we walk with Him we need not be anxious. He is mindful of us and cares for us (First Peter 5:7).

It is in the light of these truths that we have every reason to go about our lives, discharging our duties with vigor and enthusiasm, with resolution and a keen sense of responsibility and optimism.

Every generation has its challenges and we have ours. We may wish we had lived in calmer times and more tranquil circumstances, but, as Mordecai told Esther, *"Who but knows but thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"*

Our nation, our home, and the church needs the influence, standards, teaching, and discipline of Jesus Christ. Let us not fail ourselves, our children, our friends, and neighbors, and the Lord in this great hour of need. May we develop and possess Christian purpose, hope, optimism, and confidence, and allow our zeal and fervor to surge from us in doing the Master's will to His glory and our salvation.

† † † † †

"Easter"

And The Resurrection

There is a day that to many people is the most important "holy day" of the year. They call it "Easter." The prominence of its observance and the claim of its connection with the religion of Christ requires that we examine the subject from a Biblical viewpoint.

This celebration is observed annually by most Protestant, Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox churches as well as many independent denominations in recognition of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The name "Easter" comes from the name of a Teutonic pagan goddess of Spring, according to encyclopedias. It is also a term that has been used to denote a certain time of the year, such as "baseball season," "harvest time," "Thanksgiving," etc. The term nor any observance of such a special "holy day" was common

among anything called "Christian" for many years after the close of God's revelation of His will to man. As "Christianity" spread, often the spread and expanse was due to compromise with error and the adoption of pagan customs and religious rites in combination with certain Christian teaching. This attitude has caused the growth of numbers, but always contributes to the departure from the paths of truth.

Passover

The word "Easter" is found once in the King James Version of the Bible (Acts 12:4). This is a mistranslation and the word should be "Passover." It does not authorize the celebration of Easter for the Christian any more than it authorizes the celebration of the Passover. It was used to denote the time of the year because the observance of the Passover and the resurrection of Christ took place in very close proximity of each other. The use of the term in the KJV has caused many to attempt to brand the KJV as unreliable as the perverted modern versions that reek with fatal doctrinal error. Such an attack is unwarranted and it is a rather transparent effort to justify false doctrines in modern speech versions. It demonstrates the extremes to which advocates of perverted books called Bibles will go to accomodate what they want.

Churches of Christ that are patterned after the New Testament do not observe Easter as a holyday. There is no authority for it any more than observing Palm Sunday, Ash Wednesday, Holy Thursday or Good Friday, Christmas or any other man-made "holy days." What one does in matters of religion (and many brethren need to learn this) must be by God's authority (Colossians 3:17; Matthew 28:18). We must speak as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11). Easter is of human, not divine, origin. New Testament Christians did not take note of the resurrection by an "Easter" but by partaking of the Lord's Supper each first day of the week "*till he come.*" (First Corinthians 11:26). His resurrection is also noted in baptism (Romans 6:3,4).

Paul chided the Galatians for observing days, months, times and years for which there was no authority under Christ (Galatians 4:10,11). Endeavoring to be true to the Bible, resisting temptation to either add to or take from it, Christians refrain from Easter as a celebration of the resurrection of Christ, in spite of what the majority of "Christendom" may do.

Christians will note His resurrection the way Scripture authorizes rather than some man-invented ritual and celebration.

To Be Believed

The resurrection of Christ is something to be believed. The gospel of Christ is composed of facts to be believed, promises to be enjoyed, and commands to be obeyed. The resurrection is a fact of the gospel.

Jesus spent slightly over thirty-three years on earth, the final three concentrating on preparations for the establishment of His kingdom. Up and down Palestine He went, teaching, preaching, performing miracles, doing good, giving hope and converting people to Himself.

He had entered Jerusalem amidst the shouts of praise of the multitude, even though they obviously misunderstood the nature of Christ and His kingdom. They saw Him as an earthly king, even as some still mistakenly view Him today.

For a week, spending nights at Bethany and days in Jerusalem, He gave special attention to teaching His apostles. He was later betrayed by Judas, taken before various Jewish and Roman court proceedings, enduring the false charges leveled against Him, and being turned over to an angry, jealous, hate-ridden mob which was urged on by their religious leaders, and crucified. His was the death of the Just for the unjust.

His body was removed from the cross on what we would call Friday, and there it remained until the early moments of the first day of the week. It is here that our study centers.

He Arose

"Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain other with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments, and as they were afraid, and bowed their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen; remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise

again. And they remembered his words, and returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest." (Luke 24:1-9).

This is a simple and beautiful account (one of four) of the most significant event that has ever taken place. This was more important than His birth, His life, even His death. The resurrection of Christ was God's way of declaring Him to be who He claimed to be, God's Son (Romans 1:4).

Notice what is revealed. Friends came to anoint the body as was the custom. They found it not and were distressed at its absence, fearing it may have been removed by enemies and mutilated and disgraced.

They were met by two men in dazzling apparel and heard the words, "*He is not here, but is risen.*" This is as Jesus had foretold it.

Today, we either believe that announcement or we do not. It is obvious that God expects us to believe it. But He does not ask for a blind and naive acceptance. He has provided evidence that we might believe as well as be able to convict the gainsayer.

Where Was The Body?

Something happened to the body of Jesus. If the body was still in the tomb, obviously, He did not rise from the dead. But the tomb was empty. Both friend and foe alike admit this. The empty tomb is not sufficient evidence alone to prove the resurrection, but the empty tomb is one essential in the evidence.

The guards that were placed to guard the tomb claimed the body was stolen. They said it happened while they slept (Matthew 28:13). But is the testimony of one who was asleep when an event occurred reliable evidence? Furthermore, the guards proved themselves dishonest by entering an agreement with the enemies of Jesus to make this claim when they could not possibly witness anything while they were asleep. But that testimony would please the Lord's foes.

Jesus was seen at least twelve recorded times by people who would have easily recognized Him. He was not only seen, even by five hundred at once, but was touched, handled, He walked and talked with witnesses. He ate with them, as no phantom or spirit could do. His body was flesh as before His death.

Furthermore, His resurrection was preached boldly in the very city where He was condemned, and only a few days after

His death and resurrection. If there was ever a time for those who would deny it to be able to prove it false, then was the time, not some two thousand years removed by those who can know only what is recorded concerning those who were actually on the scene.

One of the strong evidences of His resurrection is the manner of life of the apostles. While Jesus was dead they doubted and misunderstood. But later they preached the risen Christ, even in face of threat, torture and death. All but one is said to have died a martyr's death. What could cause men to preach and die for something they knew to be untrue when denying their message would have made them free from such hardship and likely made them heroes among the multitudes? Is it reasonable to think men would knowingly uphold a lie when the truth would serve them better? The only explanation for such a manner of life was the simple fact that they knew they were proclaiming the truth.

It's Meaning

But what does the resurrection of Christ mean to mankind? It means there is One who has conquered death and demonstrated power over Satan. We are also subjected to death, but in Christ we can conquer death, escape Hell, rise from the grave to live in heaven with God eternally. Life is in Christ. He has overcome death and the grave and offers life to all mankind. He is man's hope and salvation, God's Son.

By coming forth from the tomb Jesus made it possible for us to live with God. All shall not live with God, but all who will do the will of the Father shall live with Him. The way is prepared and salvation from sin is extended to us. This salvation is conditioned on our obedient faith.

The entire faith of Christ is founded on the fact of His identity as the Son of God (Matthew 16:16-18). The resurrection proves that identification to be true. To the penitent believer who will confess his faith in Christ and obey Him in baptism, his sins, that would destroy him, are washed away by the blood of the risen Christ who now lives and reigns on His throne in heaven. Thanks be to God for the glorious resurrection of His Son, and that which awaits us because of Him.

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Hardening The Heart

One of the major causes for the rejection of the truth of God is a hardened heart, a closed mind, a complete unwillingness to submit regardless of the evidence. Many times truth is rejected, not because it has not been presented, not because opportunity was denied to hear it, but because the heart is so tightly closed that one will not be convinced. It is not until the one who possesses such a heart will open it to the truth, pay attention to the testimony and evidence of the truth, that good fruit can be produced in his life.

Our Texts

We often read in the Bible of people who have hardened their hearts. *"For they considered not the miracle of the loaves; for their heart was hardened."* (Mark 6:52). Some would not even be impressed by the reality of the miracles Jesus did. It was not because the miracle was fraudulent or unreal, nor because they had not witnessed it, but because they were determined not to believe.

"And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened?" (Mark 8:17). Here we find a rebuke by Jesus. Provisions had not been brought and they concluded none could be obtained. Even though they had witnessed the feeding of the five thousand and four thousand with loaves and fishes, their comprehension, trust and confidence in Christ was still confused. It was because of a hardened heart, Jesus said.

"Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen." (Mark 16:14). Even as late as after His resurrection, the apostles were suffering from a hardness of heart that caused them to have doubts and unbelief.

"He hath blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them." (John 12:40). This is yet another instance of people who allowed their hearts to be hardened. We read of warnings against hardening

the heart in the New Testament. *"But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."* (Hebrews 3:13). A similar thought is presented in First Timothy 4:2 of those who *"speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron."* It is a fearful matter to consider that one can become so hardened against the truth of God that the saving gospel of Christ will make no impression. One can become like the hard ground in the parable of the sower. Even though the seed is planted there, it cannot germinate and cannot take root because of the hardness.

"Happy is that man that feareth alway; but he that hardeneth his heart shall fall into mischief." (Proverbs 28:14). By the study of the Scriptures we learn the ultimate condemnation of those that harden their hearts. *"But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of righteous judgment of God, who will render unto every man according to his deeds."* (Romans 2:5,6). Those that harden the heart will be the recipients of the wrath of God and His judgment of condemnation.

The Hardening Process

How does the human heart become hardened? Does it happen suddenly? Is it a gradual process? Is it accomplished by oneself alone? Or are there additional factors involved in hardening the heart?

Romans 15:4 teaches that we learn from the things written aforetime, that is, from the record of those who lived before us and recorded in the Old Testament. There is a person in the Old Testament whose heart was hardened. We can learn from a study of him the answer to our questions.

The man was Pharaoh, king of Egypt, the most powerful nation in the world at that time. He had many people under his dominion, including the Israelites who were in bondage. God called Moses from the burning bush to return to Egypt and lead Israel to freedom. The events that are involved include the hardening of the heart of Pharaoh.

Exodus seven and eight tells how Pharaoh's heart was hardened. There were three factors involved. God hardened the heart of Pharaoh. *"And I will harden Pharaoh's heart and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt."* (Exodus 7:3). Second, the magicians of Pharaoh's court

contributed to hardening Pharaoh's heart. "*And the magicians did so with their enchantments and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, neither did he hearken unto them, as the Lord had said.*" (Exodus 7:22). Third, Pharaoh was involved in hardening his own heart. "*But when Pharaoh saw that there was respite, he hardened his heart, and hearkened not unto them, as the Lord had said.*" (Exodus 8:15). Let us discover the role of each, God, the magicians, and Pharaoh in hardening Pharaoh's heart.

God's Part

God's part consisted of making a demand on the king. "*Thus saith Jehovah the God of Israel, Let my people go...*" (Exodus 5:1). Of course, this was against the political and financial interests of Pharaoh and Egypt. It offended his pride, power, prestige of so great a king and he refused to obey. He said, "*Who is Jehovah that I should hearken unto him?*" But God's part was to make a demand on him.

God later sent plagues on the people and the land of Egypt to bring about their recognition of His power and compel them to comply. Under pressure and inconvenience of the plagues, Pharaoh would temporarily relent. But once the plague was lifted, he would change His mind and disallow the Israelites permission to leave.

God did not force Pharaoh to harden his heart. He did not remove from Pharaoh the power of choice. He did not make it impossible for him to obey. God made a demand of him and necessitated the making of a decision, the making of a choice to obey or disobey. This was God's role in hardening Pharaoh's heart

The Magicians' Part

The magicians played a different role. When Moses would perform some noteworthy deed, such as turning his rod into a serpent, or turning water into blood, or bringing frogs upon the land, the magicians would seemingly duplicate the deed. Just how and by what power this was done, or allowed, we would only be able to speculate. Either through some trickery, sorcery, or possibly God allowed evil powers to perform these works, we are not in a position to determine. But they did something that caused Pharaoh to have no special concern about Moses and his

God. The result of their work was to convince Pharoah to believe a lie; namely, the lie that God was nothing more than were his magicians and did not deserve to be obeyed. These magicians led Pharoah into being confident in his error, believe what was untrue, and stand firm in the wrong.

Pharoah's Part

Pharoah also hardened his own heart, and this need not be belabored. He viewed the situation and made up his own mind not to do what God directed. To submit was too damaging to his power, prestige, pride, prominence and vanity, and he determined in his own heart not to yield.

The day of hardened hearts is yet with us, even as existed in New Testament days. The warnings against it are as applicable now as ever.

God Still Has A Part

God still plays a role in hardening the heart. He has given certain commands that He expects man to obey. There are commands to be obeyed in order to enter the kingdom, and there are commands to obey after one has become a citizen in His kingdom. His commands necessitate the making of a choice on the part of mankind.

As in the case with Pharoah, often His commands run contrary to the evil desires, behavior, ambitions and determinations of sinful people. Before one can live for the Lord he must surrender his own will to God. Submission means the sacrificing of self to God to do His will. Many people do not wish to submit to God because they prefer to "do their own thing." Some go so far as to even deny God exists in order to escape the obligation they have to respect the authority and Word of God. This attitude lies at the root of atheism today.

The gospel preached acts much like fire. Jeremiah 20:9 presents the word of God as a burning fire. Fire can melt wax, but it can also harden clay. What it does depends on the quality of the material which is brought before it. The gospel can soften the heart of those who seek truth, but it can harden the heart of those who want to follow their own way. The gospel can be, and is designed to be, God's means of saving man, but it can also become the means of our condemnation if we reject it. Just as Jesus came into the world to save sinners, refusing Him is to

bring upon ourselves the wrath of God. *"For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."* (John 3:17).

Each time the gospel is heard it either softens or hardens. When it is heard, believed and obeyed, it means spiritual life. But when it is heard and rejected it will bring spiritual death.

So God still plays a role in hardening human hearts by requiring man to make a choice as to who will be his master.

The hearts of men are often hardened against the truth by those who teach them error and cause them to repudiate the truth. If the heart is filled with error there will be no room for truth. Indeed, the more error one believes the less open is his heart to the truth. He becomes prejudiced against it, closed to it, unwilling to even examine and investigate the evidence of truth.

False Teachers

Just as the magicians caused Pharaoh to believe a lie, false teachers with their false doctrines cause people to believe a lie today. They labor under a *"strong delusion"* (Second Thessalonians 2:11) and their consciences are seared (First Timothy 4:2). For this reason we must never ever allow ourselves to be led by the doctrines of men. *"And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."* (Matthew 15:14). We must ascertain that what we believe and practice is of God and founded on *"thus saith the Lord"*.

Our Part

People today still contribute to hardening their own hearts, placing more importance on what they think, how they feel, what they want, their pleasure, material ambitions, desires and pride than on what God has directed through the gospel of Christ. Man makes his own choice to harden his heart. He is not forced to do that, but chooses that way, and can eventually make himself beyond being molded and fashioned in the way of the Lord.

Seeing how the hardness of the heart is developed, and noting the warning against it, we must ask ourselves, "What of my own heart?" Is your heart pliable, moldable, soft, and receptive to the truth of God?

Consider two final words: hearken and harden. They sound much alike, but are so different. To hearken means to hear and

heed. To hearken means life here and with God in the hereafter. To harden means to hear but reject. The result is to banish oneself into the eternal fire of hell.

"Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts..." (Hebrews 3:15). But as Jesus said, *"Hearken unto me everyone of you and understand..."* (Mark 7:14).

† † † † †

A Plea For Christ

It is the desire and duty of every gospel preacher to uphold Christ and make a plea on His behalf. This is the prime work of gospel preaching. The plea is made to mankind that they might take advantage of what God has provided for mankind through His Son, Jesus Christ.

We begin our plea at the tomb of Jesus, which is significantly empty. It once contained the body of Christ. But He arose from the dead and was thereby proved to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4). Because of this empty tomb we are justified in making Him known to the world. He was God in the flesh, Emmanuel, the One sent from heaven.

The apostles first raised their voices on behalf of Christ and the fullness of His mission and message on the first Pentecost following His resurrection. They declared Him to be both Lord and Christ. Some three thousand heard the Word that day, believed it, and were baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2). Since then many others have preached the message and millions of others have heard the message. An untold number have believed and obeyed the message concerning Christ.

His Authority

We would first plead for the acceptance of the authority of Christ. All authority is His (Matthew 28:18). He taught as One having authority (Matthew 7:29). He demonstrated His authority over the elements, demons, disease and sin. Whatsoever we do is to be done by His authority (Colossians 3:17). Man's salvation is in His name (Acts 2:38). God speaks through His Son (Hebrews 1:1,2). He is the One to be heard

(Matthew 17:5). It is by Him that forgiveness of sins is to be preached (Acts 13:38). Saying "yes" to Christ means saying "yes" to His authority before all else, including parents, friends, preachers, human creeds and everything else.

To make a plea for Christ also involves letting the gospel of Christ be the only basis of your religious faith and salvation. The gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16). It must be believed and obeyed (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9). There is no room for anything else (Galatians 1:6-9) because it came from Deity (Galatians 1:11,12).

It is so important that we follow no other doctrine (Second John 9-11). If one says that one church is as good as another, we must demand there be Biblical evidence for such teaching. If one says that we are saved by faith alone, we must demand Scripture that so teaches. If one contends he can go to heaven by being a member of the Masonic Lodge, we must demand that he produce Bible teaching to prove it. So must it be with every doctrine and practice.

A man walked into a jewelry store to set his watch to the correct time. He saw many watches and was about to leave very confused. But the owner said, "Check your watch by that one," pointing out a certain one. "That one is correct and that is the one by which we measure." So it is with the Bible. With many standards offered in the world, we must "check our spiritual clocks" by God's clock, the Bible, the gospel, the redemption story through Jesus Christ.

His Name

We plead for Christ by pleading that people wear no other religious name than what we find in Scripture which is Christian (Acts 11:26; 26:28; First Peter 4:16). That is the worthy name by which we are called (James 2:7). Is it not reasonable that followers of Christ be so identified? Where is there anything in the Bible that justifies denominations or the many denominational names people wear? We read of a man who said he was a Presbyterian and a Christian. We read about Christians, but where do we read about Presbyterians? So it is with every denominational name. When we call ourselves by what the Bible teaches we are speaking as the oracles of God, which we are taught to do (First Peter 4:11).

His church

We plead for Christ by pleading for His church. It is a grievous doctrine that says, "Preach the man, not the plan, not the church." Preaching about the church is ridiculed as "church-anity" rather than Christianity. But those who say this betray an ignorance of the truth.

The church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23). He is the head of it (Colossians 1:18). He purchased it with His blood (Acts 20:28). It is His kingdom (Colossians 1:13) and His bride (Ephesians 5:23ff). He is glorified in the church (Ephesians 3:21). It is called the "*house of God*" (First Timothy 3:15). He built it (Matthew 16:16-18). He is the Savior of it (Ephesians 5:23). It is the church that He shall deliver to the Father when He comes again (First Corinthians 15:24). We are baptized into Christ with the same one baptism (Ephesians 4:4) by which we are baptized into the body (Galatians 3:27; First Corinthians 12:13). There is no other foundation than Christ (First Corinthians 13:11). How could one make a plea for Christ and not preach the church?

Christ has no fellowship with human denominations of which we do not read one word in all His revelation. The church is not a denomination, has no kinship with denominationalism. To plead for Christ we must plead for His church above every other organization, association or religious affiliation on the earth.

His Blood

We plead for Christ by pleading for people to respect the blood of Christ. We are justified by His blood (Romans 5:9). "*Without shedding of blood there is no remission.*" (Hebrews 9:22). But animal blood will not take away sins (Hebrews 10:4). But the blood of Christ will (Hebrews 9:12). It took the blood of Christ to bring the church into existence (Acts 20:28) and we who are members of the church have been bought with that price (First Corinthians 6:20). We are redeemed by His blood (Ephesians 1:7), having made peace with God through His blood (Colossians 1:20). Our sins are forgiven after we become Christians when we confess our sins, but they are forgiven by the blood of Christ (First John 1:7). We are clean and white as snow when washed in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14). There is no way to overemphasize the blood of Christ in God's scheme of man's redemption.

When does one reach that cleansing blood? It is when one is baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4) where His blood was

shed (John 19:34). It is then that we are no longer servants of sin but become servants of righteousness (Romans 6:16-18). It is then that we are raised to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). That is the form of doctrine we must obey. The song asks, "What can wash away my sins?" The answer is, "Nothing but the blood of Jesus."

His Life

We finally plead for Christ by pleading with mankind to imitate Christ in their lives. "*Be ye imitators of me even as I am of Christ,*" said Paul (First Corinthians 11:1). He is our example and we are to walk in His steps (First Peter 1:21). "*Be ye imitators of God, as dear children.*" (Ephesians 5:1). The word "followers" means imitators. We should have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5), setting our affections on things above (Colossians 3:1). The guiding principle of our day-to-day manner of living should be, "What would Jesus Christ have me to do?" This we can only learn from a study of the Bible.

If the plea for Christ is meaningful to you, you will hasten to come to Him. Believing that He is the Son of God, you will repent of your sins, confess your faith in Him, and obey Him by being baptized for the remission of sins. When one does that God adds the obedient one to the church and he is counted among the saved (Acts 2:47). So we plead for Christ by pleading for His authority, His gospel, His name, His church which is His body, His blood and His example.

† † † † †

Outsiders?

It has become the custom of some who teach error to bitterly resent anybody even suggesting they are in error. What is seldom characteristic of them is a Biblical investigation of what they teach and the corrections offered by those who resist their error. They prefer to use another method to dismiss what they have determined to reject.

If error in a congregation is taught and someone other than a member of that congregation questions it, the objection is dismissed on the grounds that the objection came from an "outsider." So what? Error is error and truth is truth regardless of who brings it to another's attention.

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Kinship With Christ

"While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold, my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Matthew 12:46-50).

We all place a great deal of importance on kinship. Usually we are proud of our ancestors, children, kinpeople. Of course, as much as we love our kin, even they are not to come before our loyalty to the Lord.

In this event in the life of Christ He shows that spiritual kinship is more important than physical kinship. He was not in any way being disrespectful to Mary, His mother, or His brothers, but He was giving emphasis to the spiritual kinship with Himself.

One of the religious problems the Jews had was their heavy dependence on their physical relationship with Abraham. John the Baptist preached to them and said, *"O generation of vipers, who warned you to flee the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance, and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham."* (Matthew 3:7-9).

An older preacher once commented that he did not like to boast too much of his family tree lest he went too far and found a rotten limb.

Kin To Christ

It is a great blessing and opportunity for mankind that we can be kin to Jesus Christ. In this we can rejoice. We can not only be kin to Christ, but kin to all those who are in Christ as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Just how can we be kin to Christ? Our kinship is not physical, but spiritual. It is a relationship that is superior to any fleshly relationship one could have.

There are certain similarities between physical and spiritual

kinships that we wish to observe. How are people related today? When do they count one another as kinfolk? How did they enter that relationship?

Born Into The Family

First, people are born into the same family. We are kin to our parents, brothers, sisters, etc. as a result of birth into the family. The same thing is true of the spiritual family of God, which is His church (First Timothy 3:15). *"Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God... Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."* (John 3:3,5). The kingdom is the same as the church (Colossians 1:13), and the church is God's family. We cannot be related to Christ outside of God's family.

The "new birth" is not difficult to understand nor is it something weird and mysterious. Before one is born, he is begotten. Paul teaches that we are begotten by the Word of God (First Corinthians 4:15). One of the reasons the commission of Christ to *"go into all the world and preach the gospel,"* is so vital is because the Word of God, the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11) must be planted in the hearts and minds of people. From that Word, faith is produced (Romans 10:17). From faith comes obedience to the commands of God whereby we are born again into His family, thereby coming spiritually related to God the Father and Christ, His Son. People cannot be saved through the message of psychology, philosophies of men, social reforms, denominational dogmas, etc. The gospel is the power of God to save (Romans 1:16). Jesus said that those who are His relatives are those who *"shall do the will of my Father."* That will is the gospel that teaches us to believe in Christ, repent of sins, confess our faith in Christ and be baptized for the remission of sins. It is by and through the gospel that it is possible for us to enjoy spiritual kinship with Christ and the saved.

Blood Kin

Second, families are obviously related through blood relationship. We come from our parents and are thereby related. This blood link ties us together with parents and brothers and sisters.

So it is that the blood of Christ links us to Him spiritually inasmuch as we are saved by His shed blood (Romans 5:9;

Ephesians 1:7). By His blood He purchased the church (Acts 20:28), and we have been bought with that great and precious price (First Corinthians 6:20). As Christians we are still cleansed by the blood of Christ (First John 1:6,7).

Too many members of the church speak of the church as something distinct and separate from themselves. The truth is, we are members of His body which is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23), and His blood is of benefit to those in the body, as is true physically as well as spiritually. We are to realize that we are in that body and related to all others in that body because of the blood relationship.

Same Name

Third, people are known to belong to their family not only because of birth and blood ties, but also because of the name they wear. We are proud of our name and wear it with distinction and significance. We are known by that name, called by that name, and are identified as belonging to a certain family because of our name.

The family of God also wears a name that was given by the Father. *"The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."* (Acts 11:26). This name enjoyed apostolic approval and reference (Acts 26:28; First Peter 4:16). The name we wear is a worthy name (James 2:7) and was prophesied in the Old Testament when both Jew and Gentile would be included in God's spiritual family (Isaiah 62:2).

The name "Christian" is a sacred name and gives honor to Christ. There is no reason nor justification for those in God's family to take upon themselves names that have originated elsewhere than from God. The name shows our relationship.

This family is not only kin to Christ and to each other, but it possesses a family characteristic of brotherly love. We sing the song with meaning, "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love." We have love for our Father in heaven, our elder brother, Jesus Christ, and for the whole brotherhood. *"Let love of the brethren continue,"* (Hebrews 13:1). *"Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king."* (First Peter 2:17).

Nothing is any more essential to a successful congregation than brotherly love. Where genuine love abounds for each other, all difficulties and problems that will arise can be resolved. We seek the other's highest good, which is the true meaning of

love. *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."* (John 13:34,35). *"This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you."* (John 15:12). This is the way it is supposed to be in God's family.

One Family

The last family characteristic we mention that shows kinship with Christ is by communion. fellowship, oneness. Something is wrong in a family when members of the family deliberately absent themselves from gatherings of the family. Something is amiss when the family circle is deliberately broken. Something is lacking when members of the family fail to appear around the family table, or be involved in family activities.

Many members of the church contribute to the breaking of family ties because they deliberately absent themselves from the Father's Table on Lord's Day. They have little to nothing to do with family activities, the worship and work of the church. They exclude from their lives the fellowship of brethren that is designed to be helpful to everyone.

God has appointed a time for His children to assemble for communion with Him. Each Lord's Day the early Christians assembled to partake of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; First Corinthians 16:1,2; First Corinthians 11:18,20). When we partake of the Lord's Supper we are eating and drinking with Christ in the kingdom as He promised (Matthew 26:29). When members of the family will ignore or set aside this gathering and communion, something is very wrong with their family relationship. This communion shows our kinship with God, Christ and the brethren (First Corinthians 10:16).

Someday there will be a glad reunion of all of God's spiritual children around His majestic throne where we shall live with Him forever (First Thessalonians 4:13ff). God will gather the "*wheat*" into His barn. Those who are related to the Lord by being "*in Christ*" will rejoice for the kinship that we have with the Lord.

Some will choose to remain children of the devil, as did some in the days when Jesus was upon the earth (John 8:44). How much better that we become and remain loyal and faithful sons and daughters of God (Romans 8:14-17).

(continued from page 19)

Truth versus error is the business of every Christian whenever, wherever, or from whomsoever it comes. False doctrines cannot be “covered up” by complaining about “outsiders.” Christians are “insiders” in these matters all the time.

Error does not deserve being “covered up,” but “cleaned up.”

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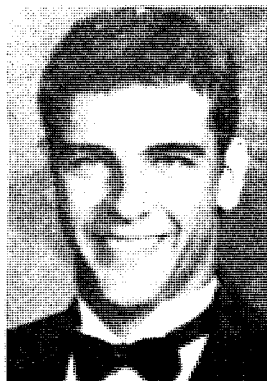
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Congratulations To Sam Boyd

Sam is our youngest. He reached a milestone in his life when he graduated from Warren County High School in May. Sam has made several adjustments during his school years because of our moving, but he has done so well. He played football, receiving letters from both the Tupelo High School as well as Warren County. He also holds a part time job with one of the local banks in McMinnville. His senior year has been especially busy for him.



His plans call for college this fall. He is also learning how to be "Uncle Sam" to more and more nieces and nephews. His mother and I have been especially proud of Sam and the way that he has handled the numerous situations in the schools that are not compatible with being a Christian. His experiences have shown him that one need not simply follow the crowd but can be his own man and chart his own course.

We have to admit that we may be a bit impartial when we consider our children, as most parents tend to be. But we have many good reasons to be proud of Sam, as well as our other children. We just do not know what we would have done without him. God bless him.

* * * * *

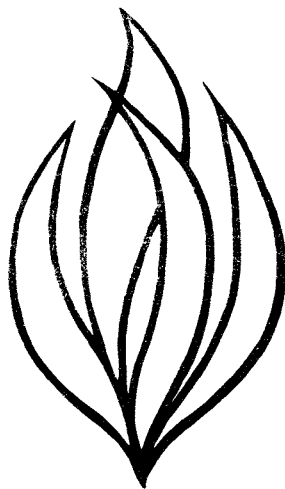
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).

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THIS ISSUE

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Fit For The Kingdom

Lesson One

What It Means To Be A Christian

Every person has some big events in life and we acknowledge them. We celebrate the day of our birth, take note of when we begin school and graduate, when we marry, significant changes such as change of residence or occupation. But there is one event that stands out that is far greater than any other because it involves not only the here and now, but also eternity. That is the time when one becomes a Christian.

But what does it mean to be a Christian? Such information is profitable to those who may be considering becoming Christians. It should be of benefit to a young Christian who takes note of the stand he has taken for the Lord. It should benefit the older soldier of the cross as he reflects upon the commitment he has made and the years of faithful service he has rendered.

To be a Christian means to be saved from sin. God forgives when one obeys the gospel and becomes, thereby, a Christian. The idea is adequately expressed in Ezekiel 18:21,22, *"But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. All his transgression that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him; in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live."* Romans 6:17,18, *"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 the servants of righteousness."*

Since your past sins have been forgiven God will look upon you as if you have never sinned. They are forgotten and forgiven and remembered against you no more. *"And their sins and their iniquities will I remember against you no more."* Hebrews 10:17. *"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.

New Relationship

To be a Christian means that you have a new relationship with God. *"The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."* Romans 8:16,17. *"Wherefore come ye out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord."* Second Corinthians 6:17,18. In this new relationship there are spiritual blessings. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ."* Ephesians 1:3. It means you have fellowship with God and are one of His companions. *"I will in no wise fail thee; neither will I in any wise forsake thee."* Hebrews 13:5. It means you have the privilege of prayer to the Father as a son. *"Draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you."* James 4:8. You are now under His watchful care. *"Casting all you care upon him for he careth for you."* First Peter 5:7.

Not Your Own

Being a Christian means you no longer belong to yourself, if ever you did. Christians belong to God. We are to be *"living sacrifices"* Romans 12:1. We have been purchased by the awesome price of the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28). *"What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, are ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's."* First Corinthians 6:19,20. *"For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman, likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant."* First Corinthians 7:22. We belong to Deity. *"And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."* Second Corinthians 5:15. God provided a ransom for us and that was Christ (Matthew 20:28). Peter says we were redeemed, *"but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."* First Peter 1:19.

This means that we cannot do just as we please, but that

which pleases the One to whom we belong. While He lifts from us the burden of sin that we cannot carry, we do assume His yoke (Matthew 11:28-30). Everything we do in life, in work, play, worship, at home, away from home, whatever and whenever, His will must be the governing factor of our existence because we do not belong to self or Satan but to God.

New Life

To be a Christian means you have a new life. *"Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature..."* Second Corinthians 5:17. Again, *"That ye put off concerning the former conversation, the old man which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."* Ephesians 4:22-24. Romans 6:1-6 teaches that we are raised to walk *"in newness of life... our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin."* This is the new birth of which Jesus spoke in John 3.

The extent that this new life is different from the former one depends in part upon how wicked the previous, pre-Christian life was. For some there is a very noticeable difference. For others, who may have been living a moral life, there may not be as noticeable difference. For a man like Cornelius there would not be as much change in his manner of living as that of a man like Saul who was making havoc of the church. It is obvious that the Corinthians who became Christians had to make a tremendous change (First Corinthians 6:9-11). It is not always easy to leave the old sinful habits and practices. It is not uncommon for the one who comes to Christ to become the target of ridicule and temptation by former associates in sin. But because God has forgiven past sins, having become a new creature, he must have the resolve to no longer walk as he formerly walked. Paul exhorts putting away the old man of sin and striving for the more excellent way.

We Can Overcome

One of the blessings the Christian now enjoys is the assurance that God will not allow temptations to come that cannot be overcome (First Corinthians 10:13). For this reason we can say with Paul, *"I can do all things through Christ which*

strengtheneth me.” Philippians 4:13.

Joy and Happiness

To be a Christian means you have entered into a happy life. Becoming a child of God is a time of great joy. Even so, being a Christian may mean persecution and hardship. How can one say being a Christian means happiness? The kind and quality of happiness to which we refer may better be classified as inward joy. Happiness is often dependent upon happenings. But the joy that belongs to those who are Christians is not disrupted by what happens. There is an inner peace with oneself, and he has the knowledge that he is at peace with God. This is the peace that passeth understanding (Philippians 4:7). The fact that we are children of God and know there is an inheritance awaiting that will not fade but is reserved (First Peter 1:3,4) gives us this great hope and joy that did not and could not exist before one is a Christian.

We do not wish to convey the idea that everything in life will forever be lovely and easy. Such is not the nature of service to God through Christ. But we shall know the benefits of doing good for others. We come to understand that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). Little wonder that it is more profitable in Christ and that we are admonished, *“Rejoice in the Lord always.”* Philippians 4:4.

Hardships

The Christian's attitude toward persecution and hardship is at great variance from that of the non-Christian. *“Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake, for their's is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you and 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. *“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 suffering; 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 evil doer, or as a busybody in other man's matters. Yet, if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf." First Peter 4:12-16.

Many other points could be listed, but this will suffice for this lesson. In brief summary, what does it mean to be a Christian? It means you have been saved from your past sins. It means you are not your own because you have been bought with the price of the blood of Christ and belong to God. It means you have been ushered into a new way of living, a life that is designed and destined to bring you genuine and inward spiritual happiness and blessings, even in face of hardship.

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Lesson Two

Worship: Public; Private

In every dispensation the Lord has expected and directed man to worship Him. As with all of the commands that God has given, worship to God is for man's benefit and man's good. God is worthy of all adoration and worship, but man needs that which is greater and higher than he is for which to strive, imitate, meditate, and center his concentration, lest he degenerate to nothing much more than the animal level.

When a person becomes a Christian, he enters into a new relationship with God, with new duties, privileges, and accountabilities. One of these new matters of his life is that of worship. It is both a duty and a privilege.

As in all ages, God directs worship through His word. He told Cain and Abel how to worship. He directed Abraham and the Israelites after him how to worship. He has shown His displeasure with those who refused to worship Him and worship the way He directed. Nadab and Abihu worshipped, but not according to the way God instructed (Leviticus 10). Cain and Abel also worshipped, but Abel did as directed while Cain did as he saw fit. Israel was always worshipping, but not always worshipping the Lord according to the Lord's way.

Acceptable Worship

Acceptable worship involves the proper object of worship, who is God, and it also involves the proper attitude and actions. John 4:24, *"God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."* To worship in spirit has to do with the disposition, intent, motive, and frame of mind. To worship acceptably in spirit one must worship submissively, reverently, in a worthy manner, humbly and respectfully. To worship acceptably in truth means to worship as truth directs, which means as the Word of God instructs. *"Thy word is truth."* (John 17:17).

When the object, act, or attitude is improper, the worship is made unacceptable. We may do the right acts with the wrong attitude, or the wrong acts with the right attitude, or misdirect our worship toward the wrong object. In any such instance, our worship is in vain. The reader is encouraged at this point to turn and read Psalm 100 and there consider the disposition toward worship that the inspired writer possessed.

What is the activity that acceptable worship requires? We live under the authority of Jesus Christ today. We do not do what was done in former ages but according to what the will of God is through Christ. So we turn our attention to what is found in the new covenant to learn what we do to worship God acceptably. (Hebrews 1:1,2; Colossians 3:17).

Prayer

In Acts 2, we read of the beginning of the church. In verse 42, among those things being done by the early church was the steadfastness and faithfulness in prayer. In Acts 4, we read of the brethren in prayer. In Acts 12, we read, *"...many were gathered together and were praying."* Prayer was an important part of the life of the Christian as recorded in the Bible.

By prayer we show our dependence on God, our respect for Him, our reverence for His name, and acknowledge His goodness and greatness, praising His glory and giving recognition to Him as the source of our blessings. Prayer is to be made according to God's will. Prayer is not a mere form and ritual, but the sincere outpouring of one's heart before God. Our prayer is to be made with the spirit and understanding (First Corinthians 14:15). Prayer is a privilege that is given to the child of God, and we have the assurance that God will hear and

answer our prayers as He deems is best for us.

Singing

Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19, along with other passages, teach us to worship God with music. It is significant that every one of the nine references to music in worship in the Christian age of which we read in the New Testament refers to a specific kind of music; namely, singing. There is no authority in the doctrine of Christ for the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship under the Christian age. Some violate God's will by playing instruments, while others violate God's will by allowing somebody else to do their singing for them, either through choirs, choruses, or just remaining silent when worship in song is to be made.

Giving

Giving is at the very heart of New Testament Christianity. God gave; Christ gave; The Holy Spirit gave. The early Christians gave. The faith of Christ is one of giving. It is unfortunate that some consider the subject of giving something commercial and offensive to them. But giving is not offensive to the genuine Christian. Only those who are greedy, selfish, who would shirk their duty and fail to see their privilege would raise objection to the emphasis on giving of our means into the service of God.

"Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." (First Corinthians 16:1,2). "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity; for God loveth a cheerful giver." (Second Corinthians 9:6,7).

God expects the Christian to plan his giving and then give as he has planned and intended. He does not expect man to give Him his "leftovers" after everything else is met. The work of the church is to be supported by the members of the church through voluntary, free-will, sacrificial offerings designed to give honor and praise to God. By giving we show our respect for His

command to give. We show our concern for His cause in the world of saving the lost. We show our recognition that we are but temporary stewards of that which He has committed to our trust and that all things belong to Him and are to be used in harmony with His will. We show our confidence in His promise and providence that He will provide if we put His kingdom and His righteousness first in life (Matthew 6:33).

Lord's Supper

A significant item or avenue of worship is the Lord's Supper. This observance is a memorial to Christ (First Corinthians 11:23-29), and we are commanded to observe it. By the supper we proclaim Christ and that which He is, what He has done, that He will come again. By the Lord's Supper we announce to the world that we rely on Christ for our salvation.

The bread and the fruit of the vine symbolize and represent the body and blood of Jesus Christ. The Lord's Supper is a notation of the grace and love that Deity has manifested toward sinful humanity. It is a period calling for self-examination before God as well as an adoration and praise for the Savior.

We are not to forsake assembling ourselves together (Hebrews 10:25). In the assembly the Lord's Supper is observed (First Corinthians 11). The early church assembled on the first day of the week (First Corinthians 16). Acts 20:7 is a recorded instance where the disciples met to partake of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week. Sacred and secular history show that the Lord's Supper was observed every first day of the week. To be true to the Biblical teaching, we must observe the Lord's Supper every first day. To designate some other time, some additional time, or fail to observe the Lord's Supper every first day is to abandon the Lord's authority and is to be as guilty of violating God's directions as was Cain, Nadab, Abihu, or anyone else who proposes to worship God, but worships Him his own way rather than the way God has specified.

Preaching The Word

We also offer praise and worship to God by teaching His Word. We need spiritual food by which to grow. The food is the Word (First Peter 2:2). To preach and teach His word honors Him and His authority above all else. For this reason, when brethren assemble for worship, the will of the Lord as is revealed

in Scripture occupies a prominent emphasis in the worship period, as it should.

Christians are to assemble for worship together. But they also have the privilege, in addition to public periods of worship, to worship in their own privacy. The teaching concerning worship is constant whether one is with brethren or is alone. The items of worship cannot be varied just because someone is off by himself. If one cannot assemble with his brethren he should worship alone. There ought to be private prayer, like Daniel. There ought to be family prayer. There ought to be public prayer. There ought to be faithfulness, steadfastness, regularity, sincerity in worship to God the Father through Christ.

Worship to God is one of the surest safeguards against apostasy when worship is offered as God has directed. Going through the motions is not what God commands. But when the heart of man is truly committed to the Lord, and the avenues of worship as God has specified are observed and respected, the Christian is strengthened and benefited even as God is adored. To be fit for the Master's use, worship must be included in the life of the child of God.



Lesson Three

Bible Study

Because of the changed relationship that exists between God and man when man becomes a Christian, there are expected alterations of responsibilities and privileges. Now we are to consider the duty of studying the Bible, the Word of God. It is unfortunate that many who have been baptized into Christ have not taken as seriously as they ought the necessity of growing in knowledge of God's message to man.

It is sometimes true that the new Christian finds it difficult to embark on a consistent study of the Bible. They have a desire to know, even a zeal and interest, but they do not know how to study. It is not unknown for those who have been members of the church for years and who have spent many hours studying the Bible in the past to discontinue their study for one reason, or

excuse, or another. It is hard to tell whether they think they know everything, or if they have just lost their love for the truth.

But knowledge of the Scriptures is a duty and there is no way around it. *"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."* Second Timothy 2:15. The Bereans were commended as being noble because they *"sought the scriptures daily."* Acts 17:11. *"As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."* First Peter 2:2. *"But grow in the grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."* Second Peter 3:18. There really is no justification for a Christian not learning what the Bible teaches.

Important

Why is Bible study so important? The all-inclusive answer is because the Bible is God's authority revealed unto man. It is the only authority. But we can be more specific. Ignorance of the Bible encourages sin and allows man to sin without a guilty conscience. Sin condemns man and when sin goes unforgiven it will mean hell to the sinner. Society is burdened with the results of sin. But a knowledge and respect for the Word of God is a deterrent to sin. *"Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against thee."* Psalm 119:11.

Ignorance of truth is the breeding place for error. Many religious systems would collapse overnight if the honest and sincere people who make up those systems knew and respected the Word of God. But they do not know what the Bible teaches. They are content to remain uninformed and are willing to be led about by their clergymen who do not teach them the Word of God.

The world is laboring under a cloud of sinful darkness that is growing blacker and blacker as it enshrouds humanity. The light of God's truth would dispell that darkness if only more people knew the truth.

Ignorance of the Bible among church people retards the work of the church in its divinely assigned mission to preach the gospel to the world. One reason the early church grew was because the membership knew the truth and everywhere they went they proclaimed it by word and deed.

Without knowledge we cannot escape perishing. *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."* Hosea 4:6. Knowledge of

the way we are to live before God is essential to a faithful Christian life. Yet, many remain without this knowledge. Paul gave the full sequence of being saved and the connection of knowledge with salvation in Romans 10:11-17.

Benefits

As we consider so many temporal and eternal benefits connected with knowledge of the Bible we wonder why so many are content to never really learn very much about it. Part of the reason is because the widely publicized philosophers of the Bible have taught people not to trust its teaching. The authority of the Bible is ridiculed in our educational institutions and the doctrines and ideas of men have been run in as a replacement. Religiously, men have taught their catechisms, disciplines, prayer books, manuals, feelings and “visions” and other such things and have provoked people to cast the Bible aside. But to throw the Bible away, in ignorance, is foolishness. There can be nothing placed alongside the Scriptures as authority. When generation after generation is being taught that the Bible is not the Word of God, more and more people will discard it without investigation, not realizing what they are casting aside. It is significant, that even though the “wise” men of our time would relegate the Bible out of the hearts, minds and thinking of people, they have yet to produce anything that even comes close to being as useful and valuable as the Word of God. But for the pride of human wisdom, they persist in denouncing it. Many will just tag along in ignorance.

Some will just accept whatever some preacher, priest, rabbi or clergyman has said and never question or measure it. While most religious teachers and leaders may well be men with higher than usual morality, it is not the rule that they know very much about the Bible.

Some are discouraged from Bible study because the Bible is a large book and seems insurmountable to them. They make the mistake of reading the Bible like they would read other books, just starting at the beginning and reading it through, expecting one chapter to add to the former one as if they were reading a novel. The Scriptures do not read that way. There is a unity and central theme and personality of the Bible, but one must study before he can rightly divide it, handle it aright. But God has not given us a book that cannot be understood. He does not command understanding and then make it impossible.

It Takes Time

Probably the most serious reason for the lack of Bible study is the pathetic and heart-breaking reason that people just will not take the time it requires. They become so involved with the affairs of this life that they starve the soul to spiritual death. They allow the here and now to crowd out the possible life in heaven with God. They fail to put first things first. What a mistake if we gain the whole world and lose the soul.

Some suggestions for Bible study are in order. First, be serious about it. Make some time for study. Set in motion with regularity a period when you will consult the Word of God. We all have the same amount of time even though we all do not have the same duties. But there is a duty that we have to come to a greater knowledge of God's Word. Shall we set our duty to God aside for something else?

Take advantage of class opportunities. Regular attendance at Bible study adds so much to our knowledge and understanding. The growth you realize may seem slow and small at the start, but like all growth, it is real and with persistence and concentration, growth is inevitable. Do not become discouraged as you investigate the will of the Almighty. Week by week, class by class, year by year, the accumulation of knowledge and its relationship to the rest of the Word will gradually unfold. You can study for many hours and seemingly learn very little, but suddenly things will come open and the light of understanding becomes evident.

Have some good Bible helps as you study to facilitate your study. Have a concordance, a good Bible dictionary, a good English dictionary also. If you have access to commentaries by faithful brethren, they are worth consulting, remembering they are not the authority. Articles from good religious journals by faithful brethren as well as a tract library will assist you in learning.

Methods

Whatever method of study you use, whether it be the study of topics or a textual study, be systematic, take notes, do not just skip about here and there, but center your study with goals in mind. You might want to study one book at a time. You may wish to investigate some subject, and here a good concordance and topical study guide can be so useful. You can find good

lessons for study in Sunday school quarterlies, sermon books, other prepared courses and tracts.

Engage in conversation with others about the Bible. Sometimes it may be little more than “sharing ignorance” but it is probing to your mind and helps you see what areas on which you need to focus study.

Whenever you study, realize that this is God’s Word. Keep your heart and mind open to conviction. Do not study just to prove somebody else wrong about something. Do not study just out of idle curiosity. Study to learn what God wants of you. This way the study will have relevance on your life.

My final suggestion is that you remember one very significant point. It is not enough to just know, intellectually, what the Bible contains. We must do the will of the Lord. There be those who have studied the Bible and as far as facts and figures are concerned, seem to be very conversant about the Scriptures. They are acquainted with its characters, events and general message. But they make no application of their knowledge. Do not allow yourself to become one of those persons who are ever learning but never coming to the knowledge of the truth. Nor be one who may know many things, but makes little or no use of what he knows. *“He that doeth the will of my Father”* is the one that is pleasing to God.

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Lesson Four

Good Works

Before a person can enjoy the promise of eternal life he must become a Christian. He must believe in Christ, repent of his sins, confess his faith in Christ, and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. God has promised forgiveness of sins to those who will obey. This does not guarantee heaven. There is a life to be lived as a Christian and that life must include an active, faithful service to God. This is an essential part of New Testament Christianity.

Many who have been baptized are not serving as they should. Before we can serve we must be fit to serve. Before we can be used we must be usable. Having changed our relationship with

God by becoming a Christian, assuming new responsibilities and benefiting from blessings, we are to worship, study, and also do good works. Christianity is a life of doing good as God has defined that good.

Let us not misunderstand the purpose of going good. This does not mean that we can please God by good works alone. Nobody can earn their way to heaven. We cannot buy eternal life. We can never deserve nor merit salvation. Good works are essential to going to heaven once we have become Christians, just as faith, repentance, confession, and baptism are essential in coming to Christ. James teaches that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone. There is the work of obedience in becoming a Christian that is essential, and there is the work of a Christian that follows. The reason our works of obedience and good works thereafter are of value is because of the grace and mercy of God, and the merit of the blood of Christ.

We Show Faith

We show our faith by our works. (James 2:14-20). We glorify God by good works. *“Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul, having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.”* (First Peter 2:11,12). *“Even so let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify the Father which is in heaven.”* (Matthew 5:16). We are to follow the example of Christ (First Peter 2:21), and He *“went about doing good.”* (Acts 10:38). We are to be a people zealous of good works (Titus 2:14). *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”* (Ephesians 2:10). We are to be careful to maintain good works (Titus 3:8,14). James wrote, *“To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin.”* (James 4:17). This should be evidence sufficient for us to understand the necessity of good works, the purpose of them, and God’s expectation of them.

Spiritual Works

We can classify good works into two groups. There are good works of a spiritual nature, and good works of a material nature.

The spiritual good works are those that primarily apply to one's soul rather than to one's physical welfare. When Jesus was teaching the will of God, condemning sin, upholding righteousness, showing man how to be saved from sin, this was primarily for the benefit of the soul of man. When we teach people the plan of salvation, their responsibilities as Christian, when we are *"fishers of men"* for the Lord, this is spiritual good work. Providing spiritual nourishment for the soul, giving encouragement, offering the divine spiritual guidance for life, planting the seed of the kingdom, which is the Word of God, we are involved in spiritual good works. To lead another to see the value of his soul and to conform to the will of God to save his soul is the greatest work one can do for another. *"Preach the word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine,"* is doing spiritual good works (Second Timothy 4:2). *"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."* (Galatians 6:10). That is spiritual good works. Likewise, *"Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins."* (James 5:19,20). The great commission, *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,"* (Mark 16:15) is spiritual good works.

We do not want to overlook the good spiritual work of encouraging one another to be faithful and strong. We are our brother's keeper and have responsibility toward each other to help each other get to heaven. We cannot be indifferent to the problems, temptations, weaknesses and dangers that we face or that are faced by our brethren. God does not want the Christian to *"go it alone,"* but has provided for fellowship with Deity and with the saved. We should provoke one another, not to anger and to sin, but *"unto love and good works."* (Hebrews 10:24).

In times of loss, bereavement, discouragements, we need to be able to rely on one another. God knows the toils of life can bend the spirit. *"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."* (Second Corinthians 1:3,4). Part of our Christian duty is to be a source of relief and comfort to others in need.

God has given spiritual assurances and hope to the Christian for his comfort. Paul wrote concerning the end of time and the resurrection of the redeemed, and concluded his remarks by saying, *"Wherefore comfort one another with these words."* (First Thessalonians 4:18).

Material Works

There is another kind of good works in the material realm. Although the soul is more important than the body, we cannot overlook the physical needs of those to whom we have opportunity and responsibility.

Christ considered the physical needs of the five thousand and the four thousand as He fed them with fishes and loaves. Many of His miracles were miracles of healing that brought relief from physical distress, pain, agony, and suffering. The report sent to John the Baptist concerning Christ was *"Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard, how the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor he gospel is preached."* (Luke 7:22). Jesus did good in a physical way for those who were God's children and also those who were not. Does not His parable of the good Samaritan show His endorsement of doing good to others in need in a physical way? Today, too many are like the priest and the Levite, willing to pass by on the other side.

James 1:27 provides us an inspired definition of *"Pure religion."* *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."* Something is tragically missing about that person who claims to be a child of God who would prevent help being offered to those in need, such as the orphans and widows.

At The Judgment

In the teaching of Jesus on the judgment scene in Matthew 25, it is evident that those who were saved were those who had done good works toward the needy, and those who were banished were those who refused to help. Christ taught that *"it is more blessed to give than to receive."* (Acts 20:35). Paul recalled the apostolic message sent to Gentiles, *"Only they would that we should remember the poor, which very thing I was also zealous to do."* (Galatians 2:10). *"As we have*

opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." (Galatians 6:10). "But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (First John 3:17). Our first duty is to our brethren, but as we can, we should help those others who suffer in this world. Never forget that the prime work of the Lord's church is the spiritual work of saving souls. This does not terminate the effort that should be made to relieve the needy.

Good works, both spiritual and material, are essential in serving the Lord as Christians. While they cannot save by themselves, neither shall we be saved without them. Christ did good works of both kinds. So should we.

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Lesson Five

Daily Living

Someone once said, "I don't believe in mixing religion and business." Some others say, "I don't believe in mixing religion and politics." Still others suggest, "I don't believe mixing religion and recreation." So on it goes. There are those areas of life that some do not think ought to be mixed with religion. It is true that we have to keep clear the distinction between religion and other matters, but the religion of which Jesus Christ is the author is one that is to be mixed with every phase of life. Christianity is not a one time, now and then, sometime faith. It is a way of life that involves everything a person say, does or thinks.

The faith of Christ is primarily a positive way of life. While there are those things that are forbidden to the Christian, there are the "don'ts" in the doctrine of Christ, the main force of Christianity is constructive, upbuilding and positive. "*Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not bear false witness...*" are all a part of New Testament Christianity. But living a life in the imitation of Christ is its main thrust (First Peter 1:21). "*Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus...*" Philippians 2:5. "*Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ.*" First Corinthians 11:1. "...*Christ shall be magnified in*

my body whether by life, or by death.” Philippians 1:20. Our aim as Christians is to bring Christ closer to people by our daily conduct in life. We have heard the old adage that says, “I had rather see a sermon than hear one.” This is the idea behind daily living as a Christian. Some have been converted, others have been repulsed, by the lives of those who profess to be Christians. *“Do all things without murmuring and disputing, that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.”* Philippians 2:14,15. This is what the faith of Christ necessitates.

Application

Christian living must be applied in various relationships of life. When one becomes a Christian there is a change in his relationship with God. But there is also a change in his relationship with the devil and with his fellowmen. *“Therefore if any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold, all things become new.”* Second Corinthians 5:17. We now turn our attention to some of these relationships.

Being a Christian affects one's relationship with his parents. *“Children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. Honor thy father and thy mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.”* Ephesians 6:1-3. *“Children obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.”* Colossians 3:20. It was written of Jesus, *“And he went down with them, and came to Nazereth, and was subject unto them.”* Luke 2:51. Children who are still under the care and provision of their parents are to accept gracefully and willingly the rule of the home by father and mother. Even after leaving home, honor to parents is commanded. Even though it is true that some parents are not very honorable, children are to honor them because they are their parents. This includes providing for parents when parents are not able to provide for themselves. Paul wrote, *“If any provideth not for his own, and specially his own household, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel.”* First Timothy 5:8. We recall a man whose father was cruel to him when he was young, partial against him when he was older, and cursed him when he was on his death bed. Nonetheless, the son found comfort in the fact that he did all that he could for his father simply because he was his father.

Being a Christian affects one's relationship to the government under which he lives. The Bible does not command one particular kind of civil government. Surely God is more pleased when civil authority respects the standards of Christianity and defends Christians as they serve God. But the faith of Christ teaches the Christian to pay his taxes, obey the laws so long as they do not demand that he disobey God in doing so, show respect for civil authority and government leaders because of their position and pray for rulers. To disobey the laws of the land is more than merely disobeying man's laws. It is disobeying God because God teaches us to obey those that have the rule over us (Romans 13:1-7; First Peter 2:17; First Timothy 2:1-3; First Peter 2:13-15). Only in the event that a law of man requires violation of a law of God is there an exception. Then we must obey God rather than man (Acts 4:19; 5:29). We are not permitted to disobey a law simply because we do not like it.

Even On The Job

Being a Christian affects the Christian when on his job earning his livelihood. Even though most people will not accept it, the way of Christ is the solution to what is known as labor-management problems. Such problems generally exist because of greed, envy, jealousy and the desire to take advantage of others, unwilling to treat one another fairly and considerately. If a man can work, he ought to work, or not eat (Second Thessalonians 3:10-12). God is not pleased with a loafer. If one works for another, Paul teaches, *"Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ, not with eyeservice, as menpleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."* Ephesians 6:5,6. *"Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as menpleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God, and whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men, knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance, for ye serve the Lord Christ."* Colossians 3:22-24. If one has other men working under him, Paul addresses him also. *"Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven."* Colossians 4:1. *"And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening, knowing that your Master also is on heaven, neither is there respect of*

persons with him." Ephesians 6:9.

Christianity affects the home and marriage. Sometimes the faith of Christ causes hardship in a home because some wish to follow Christ and others wish to continue serving themselves and Satan. Christ warned that following Him might well cause estrangement from relatives (Matthew 10:21,34-39). But when everyone of the family is obedient to the Lord the home will be what God wants it to be and what it is intended to be.

Following the will of Christ assists people in selecting their marriage partner. Christians marrying Christians should be the goal. We need the good influence of one another in the family to be faithful to the Lord. Being married to one who is disinterested in Christ, antagonistic to that which is supposed to be the nearest to the heart of the Christian, having to be loyal to one who is sinful and rebellious, places such a strain on the home and its success is almost impossible. It is far better to remain unmarried than to be yoked with one who is going to cause you to lose your soul.

The doctrine of Christ governs the husband's attitude and action toward his wife, and vice versa. Together in Christ they live under a common standard and have a divine basis upon which to make decisions and solve problems. The doctrine of Christ prohibits divorce, *"except for the cause of fornication."* Matthew 19:9. Therefore, setting the standard of life together until death separates them is of supreme importance. Many problems in marriage are directly traceable to the religious division and tensions that accompany that division. When husband, wife, father, mother and children submit to the will of the Lord the home will be the nearest thing to heaven that this world afford.

Christianity will affect the parents' duty toward their children. We have already noticed how it affects the children's attitude toward parents. But it works the other way also. Fathers will bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). They will train their children in the way they should go (Proverbs 22:6). The birth of a child into the home imposes an awesome responsibility upon the parents to make sure that the child is molded and taught in such a way that they know God's will and are encouraged to obey it. Physical, mental and social and economic assistance to the child is secondary to the spiritual upbringing that the parent owes the child. With godly parents the soul of the child is of primary concern.

In The World / Not Of The World

Christians live in the world but are not to be of the world. We are not to partake of the sinful things of the world. We must guard ourselves from behavior that brings reproach on that for which we stand and which we profess. We are to be a peculiar people (Titus 2:14), a people who are different because of the kind of daily life that is lived. The worldly standards are not the standards by which we measure. We are to convert the world, not conform to it (Romans 12:1,2). *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever."* First John 2:15-17.

Christianity even governs our attitude and action toward enemies if such we have. Jesus, who was perfect in every respect, had enemies. How much more might frail followers expect to have enemies. Paul urges us to live peaceably with all men as far as is possible (Romans 12:18). But even that teaching implies that there may be times when it is not possible.

We are not to be overly disturbed if we are hated. *"Marvel not my brethren if the world hate you."* First John 3:13. *"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."* John 15:18. But when we are hated, we are taught to render good for evil (Romans 12:20,21; Matthew 5:43,44). Instead of eye for an eye, it is love for hatred. Instead of seeking revenge, it is rendering good for evil. The "golden rule" of Matthew 7:12 is the standard for the Christian toward all, even enemies. When Christ was reviled, He reviled not again (First Peter 2:23).

This is a very difficult test of our faith to follow Christ when dealing with those who seek harm and destruction. Especially is it difficult when you have the truth and the means to score a great victory over your opponent. But we must guard our motives in what we do. The better way to deal with enemies than to seek their destruction is to pray for them, and try to befriend them. If he rejects you, he will eventually destroy himself. In the judgment, God will settle the matter. We must have the attitude of Christ when He was on the cross, *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."*

In Speech

There are other areas where the teaching of Christ and being a Christian determines our daily life. We shall mention just one other briefly. The way of the Lord governs the way we speak, our conversation, and the use of our tongue. Our speech can contribute to our salvation or to our condemnation, depending on the way we use this blessing of communication (Matthew 12:37). We can talk ourselves into hell. James writes an abundance of instruction governing the use of the tongue. But Christianity makes a difference. Those who are faithful to Christ will be known for clean and pure speech.

Being a Christian is a full-time occupation and profession. It regulates everything we do, where we go, what we say, who we select as friends, our activities, what we can support, what we oppose, where we stand, how we work, play or whatever is a part of life. Certainly it governs our worship and work, but being a Christian means letting Christ have His way in your daily life.

† † † † †

Matthew 16:13-19

"When Jesus came into the coasts of Ceasarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered, and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

It was in this fashion that the Holy Spirit through Matthew records the intentions of Jesus to establish His church. Our lesson proposes to learn in some detail the truth that is here revealed. We are persuaded that much misunderstanding of the Lord's church can be cleared away by understanding this passage.

Who Is Jesus?

Jesus and His disciples were in a period of retirement that we might call a vacation, but more of a relief from the multitudes that constantly pressured them. The disciples had been throughout the land preaching the coming of the kingdom of heaven. This close association with the people enabled them to glean firsthand knowledge of what the people thought of Jesus. Jesus asked them who the people thought He was.

As might be expected when something is left to the opinions of men there was little unanimity of thought. Some thought He was John the Baptist, who was already dead, or one of the prophets, even some great one like Elijah or Jeremiah returned from the dead. It is interesting to note that at least there was no report of identifying Him as someone decadent and degenerate like some are inclined to do in our anti-Christian society.

Jesus had been with His disciples for nearly three years. They had seen His miracles, heard His teaching, and were in a position to know the truth about His identity. Peter responded, *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."*

Jesus acknowledged this statement by noting that the source of such information was a revelation from God. It was not a mere human opinion. Then He uttered what has unnecessarily become a highly controversial statement. *"I say unto thee that thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."*

Not Peter

Some have erroneously determined that Peter is the rock upon which the church of Christ is built. There are two words involved here. One is the word "petros" which is masculine gender and means a fragment of stone and translated Peter. The other is "petra" which is feminine gender and means a solid ledge of massive foundation of rock. This difference certainly shows that the rock and Peter were not one and the same. In essence, Jesus is saying to Peter, "You are but a pebble, but that upon which I will build my church is an unmovable, mountainous ledge of rock."

Nothing here indicates what Romanists like to call "the primacy of Peter." That the foundation is Christ and His identity as the Son of God is further confirmed by Paul's statement in First Corinthians 3:11, *"For other foundation can no man lay*

than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." The truth concerning Jesus that Peter confessed is the rock upon which the church is built. Indeed, it is the foundation of all of Christianity.

His Promise

The statement also notes that Christ would build the church sometime in the future from that moment. "*I will build...*" is future tense. This is significant in view of the false teaching of some denominationalists that the church existed before the cross, established even in the lifetime of John the Baptist. But when Jesus uttered these words the church had not yet been established, was yet future, but John was already dead (Matthew 14).

The contention that the church was built during the days of John is a part of the false doctrinal concept that salvation is obtainable today on the same terms some received it prior to the cross, like the thief, or by faith only without baptism. But the words of Jesus puncture that doctrine because the church had not yet been built.

The statement also shows the One to whom the church belongs. It is the church of Christ. "*I will build MY* (emphasis, JWB) *church.*" He purchased it with His own blood (Acts 20:28). He is the head of it (Colossians 1:18). It is His body (Ephesians 1:22,23). It is His kingdom (John 18:36; Colossians 1:13). It is called after Him (Romans 16:16). In view of this array of Biblical evidence as to whom the church belongs, why should men have the audacity to name it other than the way the Bible does?

Notice also the singular number - church- He would build. He would build His one church. He is not the founder of a vast variety of religious organizations that differ one from the other in doctrine, practice, name, and often even contradictory matters between them. There is one body (Ephesians 4:4), and the body is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23). He is the head and there is only one head and one body.

The religious division that characterizes denominationalism is as foreign to the teaching of the New Testament as light from darkness. Those who contend "one church is as good as another" should do some serious concentration on the fact that Jesus only promised to build one.

Church's Foundation

Peter was blessed for his confession. That truth is the foundation of the church. The church did not exist prior to this time. It came into being on the first Pentecost after the Lord's ascension (Acts 2).

The church belongs to Christ and there is but one of which He is the founder, builder, foundation and Savior (Ephesians 5:23).

Jesus also said the *"gates of hell shall not prevail against it."* The word "hell" is translated from the word "hades," which means the unseen state of the dead. It is not the *"gehenna"* hell that is mentioned many other times and refers to the state of eternal torment. What Jesus taught is that even though He would die and be buried, He would come forth. Death would not prevent the establishment of the church. In view of His forthcoming resurrection, even death shall not prevail over those who are faithful members of the Lord's church for *"in Christ"* is our victory over death (First Corinthians 15:57). Death could not prevent its establishment nor shall death have victory over it.

Today, we can rejoice that the Lord built His church and even more that we can be members of it. The saved make up the church (Acts 2:47). Christ will save the church (Ephesians 5:23). The church, which is the same as the kingdom, will be delivered unto the Father when Jesus comes again (First Corinthians 15:29).

Still The Same Terms

The terms of entrance into His church are the same now as in the days of the New Testament. Faith in Christ (John 8:24), repentance of sins (Luke 13:3), confession of our faith (Luke 12:8,9), and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins (Galatians 3:27; Acts 2:38), is the process of salvation and entrance into the body which is the church (First Corinthians 12:13).

You never read of "getting saved" of going out and "joining the church of your choice." You never read of "joining any church." You do read of hearing the gospel, believing it, obeying it, whereupon God adds you to His church.

† † † † †

Fit For The Kingdom

Luke 9:62, "And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

This passage has been properly cited as Biblical evidence that it is possible for one who has once started toward heaven by serving God in Christ to turn back and thereby render himself unsuitable to be considered as one pleasing before Almighty God. He has apostatized.

It is also evident that there is such a thing as being "fit" for the kingdom and therefore there is such a thing as being "unfit." It should be the goal in life of every person to be acceptable before God. Nothing else really matters if this is not true of us. But what does it take to be "*fit for the kingdom?*"

This issue presents the first five lessons of a ten lesson series on that specific theme. We plan to have the final five in the following issue. These lessons have proven useful for ladies' classes, a series for Wednesday evening Bible study, almost a quarter's work for a Sunday morning class. We hope they will prove beneficial to all who read whatever further use they may make of them.

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

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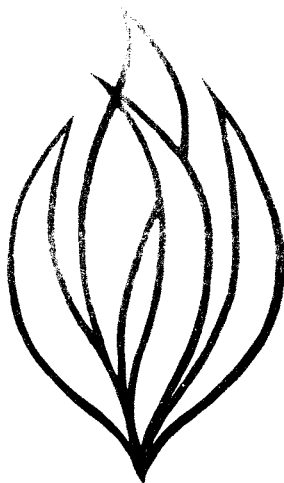
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A Burning Fire



“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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(Final Five Of Ten Lessons)

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Fit For The Kingdom

Lesson Six

The Divine Nature

When we studied Christianity in daily living, we learned that we must imitate Christ. How can we, being human, weak, sinful, have the ability to imitate Jesus who was sinless, perfect, and the divine Son of God? The nature of Christ differs from the nature of man. He, being Deity in the flesh, possessed perfection qualities that man can possess only in a limited way. In order for us to imitate Christ, we must develop a Christlike nature, striving toward His perfection.

God has encouraged us and motivated us to become partakers of the divine nature through great and precious promises. He not only offers us guidance, comfort, protection, and providence in this life, but heaven after this life is over. What greater incentives could be provided us? He has not left us alone without aid in becoming partakers of a nature like Christ.

We often hear it said that human nature never changes. We believe this is true. We also believe that human beings can change. They can grow and become what they had not been previously. We can become more and more like Christ until "*we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*" (First John 3:2). While we may not fully comprehend all that is implied in that statement, it is certain that mankind can become partaker of the divine nature.

Can People Change?

We have heard it said regarding some people, "A leopard cannot change its spots." We do not know much about leopards, but evidently the Lord thought mankind can change because Christ came to this world to bring about the change that is needed to make sinful man fit for His service and His fellowship.

Becoming like Christ is not something that happens automatically or suddenly. A person is not steeped in defiant and rebellious sin one moment and possess the character and

disposition likened unto the Son of God the next. Becoming like Christ and partaking of the divine nature is a matter of spiritual growth. It is a process that never knows completion as long as we live on earth.

First Peter, chapter one, points out how God has provided the way whereby we can become like Christ. Having offered great and precious promises to those who will strive to be like him, Peter, by inspiration, tells us of the qualities we must develop. The development of these Christlike qualities requires a constant and persistent effort on our part.

The starting point is faith. *"Without faith it is impossible to be pleasing to him..."* (Hebrews 11:6). Christ said, *"Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."* (John 8:24). Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). Before we can begin to build a character like Christ we must have this obedient faith which the gospel teaches. Then these various traits are built, simultaneously, not one at a time. They are so interwoven one with another that they cannot be separated except for study.

To faith we must add virtue, which means courage, boldness, manliness. In the life of Peter we see demonstrated virtue and the lack of it. He lacked virtue when he denied the Lord three times. He displayed virtue when he stood before the Jewish leaders, risking his life, defying their commands to cease preaching the gospel. He continued to preach Christ even under the threat of persecution and death. Virtuous people are not afraid nor ashamed to stand up for the truth of God whenever, wherever, and before whomsoever they have the privilege to stand.

Other Additions

To virtue we are to add knowledge. Some knowledge is essential before one can become a Christian. He must know the truth concerning Christ, the plan of salvation, etc. Having obeyed the gospel plan, he must add to his knowledge lest he fail to grow and be strengthened. He needs to be grounded in the truth, able to withstand false doctrines so he will not be tossed to and fro by them, able to teach the truth and convict the gainsayer. This knowledge comes through the study of the Bible. Bible study is an essential activity in becoming more like Christ. Therein the Christ is revealed. How else and where else can we even know what we are to imitate?

To knowledge add self-control, sometimes called temperance. Self-control has two meanings. Some have limited the meaning of temperance to moderation and this almost exclusively to drinking alcoholic beverages. Such a concept fails to understand the teaching of the Holy Spirit. Self-control or temperance means abstinence from that which is sinful. One cannot claim to have self-control unless he refrains from what is evil. And it also means to use and partake in moderation even that which is acceptable and good.

There is nothing sinful about eating food, unless it is done without self-control. There is nothing but evil in consuming alcoholic beverages. There is no way to lie moderately, steal moderately, commit adultery with moderation. These things are sinful in themselves. Such things as eating, recreation, work, etc. are right in themselves but must be utilized with moderation. The Christian knows how to regulate his life and control himself, keeping himself in circumspect boundaries of behavior. The lack of self-control is at the root of many of the problems mankind brings upon itself. Happy is that person who has learned to manage his life and keep himself under bondage. This idea of "letting yourself go" is contrary to the teaching of the Lord. Christians won't do that. They possess temperance.

More Additions

We are to add the quality of patience to our character. Patience refers to faithfulness, endurance, steadfastness. Job is presented to us in the Bible as an example of patience (James 5:11). In the face of all his suffering and disappointments, he never gave up, he kept on going, he stayed faithful to God, and refused to accept his wife's advice to "*curse God and die.*"

Being patient means that we serve God in good times and bad, in easy times and difficult ones. In adversity as well as prosperity, the Lord is our God. Our faith is one of conviction, not merely convenience.

We are to add to our characters the quality of godliness. Godliness is not the same thing as "godlikeness." Godliness refers to reverence, respect for things holy and sacred. It is genuine piety toward God.

A godly person would never take God's name in vain. He will not speak disparagingly of the Lord's church, His commands, or anything related to Him. He respects God's authority and cherishes God's promises. Reverent esteem is what he shows

toward Deity. While a godly man may at times stumble, he will also rise from such things and press on because he knows and loves all things that are of God. Even when so much of the world is showing contempt and offering ridicule for the standards and doctrine of Christ, the godly man will bend his every effort to conform himself to that teaching. He holds God in awe and reverence.

Finally, we are to add brotherly kindness and love. These two qualities can be considered together for they are much alike. We are to have brotherly kindness toward our brethren. We are also to seek the highest good of all those around us. This is the meaning of love. Love is unselfish, seeketh not her own. Love is concerned about the welfare of others and what is best for others. Our first priority is toward brethren in the Lord. The love that the Christian must develop extends beyond his brethren. If we only love those that love us, in what way are we distinctive or different? Christ reasoned in Matthew 5:43ff that we are to do more than that.

Many problems and much strife would cease to exist in the church and in the world if more of us could learn to possess and practice genuine love, a trait of character that is a part of the divine nature.

Jesus Demonstrated Love

Jesus showed us what love is. *“Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”* (John 15:15). Have you ever considered how Jesus even went beyond this, and gave His life for those who were alienated from God, yet sinners, and died for such? (Romans 5:6-9).

Peter closes these remarks with great assurance that developing such a character will produce only our spiritual good. *“For if these things be in you and abound...”* then certain blessings will be enjoyed. We will not be unfruitful in the service of God. We will not be blind but be able to see what is of real value and truth, not groping about in darkness, but seeing in the light of truth. We can make our calling and election sure. This provides us with security and confidence. If we possess these qualities we shall not fall. The Lord does not guarantee us sinless perfection, and those who either claim such or expect such have no basis for their thinking in Scripture. In the adding of these qualities we can build a preventive power against falling away. There is an entrance into heaven awaiting us.

Is there any wonder, then, seeing the end result of having a Christlike nature, that it is called a divine nature? There is abundant life with Deity in fellowship while we live here on earth, plus the assurance of eternal joy in heaven with the redeemed of all the ages.

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Lesson Seven

The Church And You

We begin this lesson with some questions. What is the church? What is your relationship to the church?

The church is composed of people who have been saved from their past sins by the blood of Jesus Christ, having rendered obedience to the commands of the gospel of Christ. God alone forgives sins, and God alone makes one a member of His church. God adds the saved to the church (Acts 2:47). People do not and cannot “join” the church like they would some club or fraternal organization. When they believe, repent of their sins, confess their faith in Christ, and are baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, their sins are forgiven them and God adds them to the church, the company of the saved.

The church is identified as the family of God (First Timothy 3:15). It is called the “*house of God*” which is His family. The church is also called the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23). The church is that organization and institution of people who have been purchased by the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28), and are therefore the possession of God (First Corinthians 6:19,20). There is no such thing as being saved apart from the church because the church is the saved. The same process of obedience whereby one’s sins are remitted is the process by which one becomes a member of the church. This denominational teaching that we do one thing to be saved and something else and different to “join” some church is a false teaching and has no root in Scripture whatsoever.

The church is also called the kingdom of God (Matthew 16:16-18). Those that make up the church are those who are in the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). Christ is the King of the kingdom and Christians are the citizens of it. It has no earthly

headquarters because the throne of the King is in heaven (Acts 7:49). It is a spiritual kingdom, not one of this world (John 18:36).

The church of Christ is not a denomination. One never reads about denominations in the Bible. Denominationalism is entirely a creation of man and is the result of apostasy from the truth of God. There is no divine authority for the existence of any denomination on the face of the earth. If a church is a denomination, it is not the church of Christ. If it is the church of Christ, it is not a denomination.

You Are Or You Are Not

What is your relationship to the church? At this moment you are either a member of the Lord's church or you are not. If you are a member, then you are a Christian, one whose past sins were forgiven when you were baptized. If you are not a member of the church, you are yet lost and doomed in your sins, and there is not a word of hope for your soul anywhere in the Bible so long as you remain as you are. All spiritual blessings are found "*in Christ*" (Ephesians 1:3) and if you are not in Christ, you are not the recipient of His spiritual blessing. Nor shall you be until you are a member of His church.

Let us turn our attention to certain responsibilities that you have in the church toward others who are members of the church and learn more of the relationship one should have toward the church.

Government

You should be identified with a local congregation. The universal church has no organizational or governmental structure other than Jesus Christ as the King. Christ is the head of the church (Colossians 1:18). Christians in a given locality make up a local congregation. They assemble for worship, have fellowship together in the doing of the work of God.

The local church is ruled and overseen by men designated as elders or bishops. There is to be a plurality of bishops in each congregation, men who meet certain specified qualifications as given in First Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The local church is served by those called deacons. There are preachers and teachers, and the membership makes up the body. There is no ecclesiastical structure larger than the local church in the church which Christ

built. One of the major avenues of digressions has been the departure from the governmental structure of the church. Once that is set aside or altered, then liberties of every sort are brought in and apostasy is sure to follow.

A Christian is to cooperate with those who have the leadership of the local church. He is under their watchcare and oversight. They have the authority in matters of judgment and opinion over the local church. The church is not a democracy, nor is to be ruled by tyrannical means. The universal church is a monarchy with Christ as king and each local church governed as we have noted. Each member has an obligation to those who are called upon to serve as elders. Elders are to be *“esteemed highly for their work’s sake.”* (First Thessalonians 5:13). Members are to obey them (Hebrews 13:7). One violates God’s law to raise rebellion against the duly ordained eldership when that eldership is acting according to Scripture and within the boundaries of their authority. Careless and reckless accusations against elders are not to be received. Good elders do not have to ask for respect and consideration because they so conduct themselves that they win the confidence of those over whom they have oversight.

Its Work

When plans are made for the carrying out of the work of the church, our relationship to the church is to be one of cooperation and harmony.

Each member is obligated to contribute of his means to the local church. Financially, the church is dependent upon members who give willingly, cheerfully, bountifully, sacrificially. The church is not authorized to go into business ventures to make money. Saving souls, not money, is the work of the church. To withhold your support to the local church is to withhold that which belongs to God. We would not contend that every contribution you make must be given to one local church, but we would contend that every Christian has the duty to the church to give. It is surely not a matter of great debate that the support of the local church should not only fall on a few while others feel no responsibility whatever. We are brethren and should have joint participation with each in this matter.

As a Christian, your relationship to the church should be one that tends to making and keeping the church united, as Jesus prayed for the church to be. The influence and power of the

church is often drained away because of division. In matters where God has spoken, there is no room for division. We are to speak the same things and be of the same mind (Philippians 1:27; First Corinthians 1:10). In matters of human wisdom and the exercise of opinion, we should be charitable toward each other, remembering that the eldership has the duty and power of making such decisions for the local church. Seldom will everybody be pleased with every decision. It is our task to work for unity, not division. We might note that elderships that are attune to the disposition of the congregation will take into consideration what others think before making decisions that affect the entire body. As for matters of faith where God has spoken, their duty is clear. They are to uphold the Word of God regardless of what others may think. Good leaders are considerate, attentive, openminded and try to create the unity among brethren that is easy to sustain by the members. A sower of discord is abominable to the Lord (Proverbs 6:16ff) and one places his soul in danger to foment division and strife just to have his own way.

Love The Brotherhood

Where there is genuine love for God and Christ and the Holy Spirit, where there is love among brethren, where the truth and its power is utmost in the minds of the brethren, unity, peace, harmony, cooperation is much easier maintained. Each Christian should always try to be a part of the solution to every problem, never the source of it.

As a Christian, you owe it to every other member of the church to live a righteous life. We do not have the right to live anyway we want. We must take into consideration the influence and effect that it has on the rest of the brethren, as well as the image our behavior places before the world about the church of Christ. One of the most powerful weapons in the arsenal of the devil is hypocrisy among members of the church. The devil delights in being able to point to the professed Christian and take note of his inconsistencies and sins. Teachers of the truth are often placed in embarrassing situations when trying to proclaim and defend the truth because there are those of their own brethren who are so involved in sin that his words of instruction have little effect on his hearers. You have no right to ruin the influence of the church, to retard the efforts made to save souls, to bring reproach on the name of Christ by living a hypocritical

life. This attitude that it is nobody's business but my own what I do is false. What we do involves God, His church, as well as our own spiritual welfare.

To help the church remain pleasing to God, every member should check everything by the Bible. We all should insist that what is preached and practiced be authorized by the Scriptures. Only in this way can we prevent the congregation where we attend from drifting away from the straight and narrow path. Almost from the time of the beginning of the church there have been those who have wanted to go beyond the doctrine of Christ. Likewise, there have been those who have been "watchdogs" that often confused their watching with their insistence that everything be done their way. We all do need to watch and be alert to the slightest deviation from the truth. Digression does not occur suddenly but gradually, little by little, step by step. Only a persistent and consistent measuring by the Scriptures will keep the church on course. Everyone has a duty in helping to do this. We have the duty to uphold the truth as it is taught, and to oppose and expose error whenever and wherever it raises its Satanic head.

If you are a Christian, you and the church are inseparable because you are one of the members of it. You have to sustain a relationship to all the rest of the redeemed. We not only need to know what that relationship is, but we must determine that we will be one who will be found performing as the Lord has commanded.

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Lesson Eight

Overcoming Sin And Its Consequences

On order to reach heaven, we must not only be forgiven of our past sins but we must keep our lives free from sin. Our past sins are forgiven when we obey the gospel in faith, repentance, confession and baptism. But this does not guarantee heaven. What is too often overlooked is another condition of salvation; namely, that of being faithful. *"Be thou faithful unto death and I*

will give thee the crown of life." (Revelation 2:10). Even though we cannot be sinlessly perfect, we can be faithful. The doctrine of once saved, always saved, that one cannot fall so as to be lost, is false.

Once we become Christians the devil does not cease to try to recapture our souls *"Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil walketh about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour."* (First Peter 5:8). Just as God did not forget man in sin, the devil does not forget man in Christ. The possibility of falling is not our theme in this lesson, but we take note of that possibility nonetheless.

The thrust of our lesson is that God does not leave us helpless in our battle against Satan and sin. He has promised us the ability to resist temptation and overcome and/or endure whatever comes our way (First Corinthians 10:13). *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."* We have His Word as a *"lamp unto our feet"* to lead us in the way that we should go. With the Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit, we can wage warfare against Satan and put temptation to flight even as did He.

Every baptized believer must be concerned with facing sin and overcoming its intent, design and destruction so as to escape the ultimate wages of sin which is spiritual death (Romans 6:23).

How Sin Develops

We need to learn how sin develops. In finding a way to overcome a disease the medical scientists try to learn how that disease is produced. This is why there is continued research. Once this knowledge is known they are better able to locate a place to attack it, even cure it. A similar procedure is necessary in dealing with the spiritual disease of sin.

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man, but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived it bringeth forth sin, and sin, when it is fullgrown, bringeth forth death." (James 1:13-15). Sin does its work in three stages.

Temptation

The first stage is that of temptation. There are two elements to temptation: (1) desire or lust, and (2) opportunity or enticement. People are not tempted when there is only desire. Nor are they tempted only when there is opportunity to sin. But when the two are found together, there is temptation. Let us illustrate. A man may desire an alcoholic beverage. But there is none available. He is not yet tempted. Beverages may be available but the man may have no desire for them. Again, there is no temptation. But if he desires it and it is available, then he is tempted to sin by drinking it.

It is not a sin to be tempted. Our Lord was tempted (Matthew 4) and tempted in all points as we are (Hebrews 4:15), but He did no sin (First Peter 2:22). Temptation equals desire plus opportunity.

Yielding

The second stage in the development of sin is yielding to the temptation. This involves the action, whether physical or mental. One can sin through mental action as well as physical action. Sin equals temptation plus yielding. Sin involves transgression or violation of God's law (First John 3:4). Desire plus opportunity plus yielding equals sin.

Death

The third stage is spiritual death. Death means separation. When one sins he separates himself from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). In Revelation 21:8, after listing a number of sins, it is stated that *"their part shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."* The ultimate result and wages of sin is an eternal separation from God in hell.

The glorious hope that can be ours in Christ Jesus is that sin need not bring spiritual death eternally to us because we can be forgiven in Him. This was the mission of Christ to this earth to forgive man of sin (First Timothy 1:15). He shed His blood *"for the remission of sins."* (Matthew 26:28). We might compose another equation that reads, sin plus no forgiveness equals spiritual death. Sin plus forgiveness equals spiritual life. Our full equation can be read as follows: Desire plus opportunity plus yielding plus no forgiveness equals eternal spiritual death.

How To Overcome

How can sin and its consequences be overcome? We can first attack it at the point of desire. As Christians we are to learn to control our appetites and desires. We must crucify evil desires (Galatians 5:24). This is accomplished by controlling our thoughts. Read Colossians 3:2 and Philippians 4:8 in this connection. Much of our evil desire springs from an over-emphasis on the pleasures and goals of this life. We must learn to guard our hearts. A greater concentration on heavenly things makes us have a stronger appetite for that which is good and right and a greater distaste for sinful things. We come to the place when we do as Paul instructed, "*Abhor that which is evil and cleave to that which is good.*" (Romans 12:9). Solomon wrote, "*As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.*" (Proverbs 23:7). It is not saying that a man is what he thinks he is, but rather he is what he thinks. The heart is the fountain from which evil desires spring (Matthew 15:18,19).

Sin can also be attacked at the point of opportunity. We should shun situations that offer opportunity to sin. We may not be able to avoid all of them, but we can seek good companions, refrain from the appearance of evil, not allow ourselves to be constantly bombarded with opportunity to do wrong. Too many people, possibly thinking themselves stronger than they are, will go places, say things, do things that will only lead them into temptation. Why pray for God to deliver us from evil and then flirt with opportunity to sin? There are some jobs a Christian cannot hold. There are some people with whom Christians ought not have close association as friends and companions. There are places where no Christian ought to go. It is easier to fall before temptation under some circumstances than others. The best way to combat sin with respect to opportunity to sin is to put distance between yourself and the opportunity, as did Joseph when he was tempted by Potiphar's wife.

Then we must ever be developing control over ourselves so that we will not yield even when tempted. There are desires of the human being that are not sinful in themselves, but can be satisfied sinfully, such as the sexual desire. These desires are to be satisfied in the holy estate of marriage. Therefore, even though the desire resides, and opportunity may arise to sin, we must have control over ourselves and resist the devil. James says, "*Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*" (James 4:7). Too many flirt with the devil and then wonder what happened. We can develop this self-control by studying carefully how to

possess the characteristics of the divine nature of which Peter wrote in Second Peter one.

All Have Sinned

But we must recognize that we are all too often not as strong as we ought to be and in spite of ourselves there are times when the desire is so strong, the opportunity so enticing, our self-control so weak, that we yield and sin. We bring abomination upon ourselves. To enjoy an eternal life with God we must be forgiven of our sins. John wrote, *"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."* (First John 1:8-10).

A Christian is not baptized again as when he was born into the family of God and when his past sins were forgiven that way. But God's plan for forgiving His children of sin requires repentance, confession of sin and prayer. Peter told Simon to *"Repent... and pray..."* (Acts 8:22). John added that we must confess our sins (First John 1:9). Repentance, confession and prayer is not the plan of God for one who is not a Christian to be forgiven. It is the plan for the Christian who has sinned to be forgiven. The Christian is in the body of Christ where he is in contact with the cleansing blood of Christ. As John wrote, *"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."* (First John 1:7).

We are not commanded to be sinlessly perfect. God has never commanded that of which we are incapable. While perfection is the goal and the standard, we realize we sin. But because of our relationship with God through Christ forgiveness is easily available to the faithful who meet His terms. This is what God expects. Faithfulness means to keep on keeping on, not giving up. *"Be not weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not."* (Galatians 6:9). It is not to the perfect, but to the faithful, that the crown of life will be given (Revelation 2:10).

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Lesson Nine

Discerning Good And Evil

“For everyone that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” (Hebrews 5:13,14).

This passages takes notice of two stages of Christian growth. There are “babes” and there are those called “fullgrown or of full age.”

How do we identify and describe a “*babe*” in Christ? It has nothing to do with one’s actual chronological age. Rather it is a matter of mental and spiritual attainment rather than a physical state. One may be elderly as far as years are concerned and still be a babe in Christ. On the other hand, one may be relatively young in years, but be strong and exhibit great spiritual maturity, although not many who are very young are spiritually mature because of the lack of opportunity to grow and develop. One can even be an intellectual giant and a mental whiz but be yet a babe in Christ.

A babe in Christ is a new Christian who may not know much more about Christianity than the plan of salvation which he has obeyed to enter into Christ. Just as we enter our fleshly family by being born into them, we enter God’s spiritual family by being “*born again*.” (John 3:3,5). We then embark on a journey of maturing and growing in the imitation of the Son of God. A babe in Christ has just begun to walk with the Lord.

A fullgrown man in Christ is one who has reached a level of maturity that demonstrates spiritual wisdom, knowledge and is manifested in his words and deeds. Obviously, those who have had more years in which to partake of the things of Christ are expected to be more mature than those who are younger. Unfortunately, there are some who have had years of opportunity to grow and mature but are still very immature, almost retarded in their growth.

Not Sinlessly Perfect

We would not want to leave an impression that we shall ever

reach such a state of maturity in this life that we are sinless or that we can attain such a degree and level of growth that we could be perfect as was the Son of God. We never reach the place when we cannot grow. We shall always be in a state of growth as long as we live. Mature people grow as well as immature ones.

Going from the state of being a babe to that of a fullgrown or mature Christian requires study, knowledge, devotion, faith, humility and characteristics that are like Christ, words and deeds that reflect what was once said of the apostles that *"they had been with Jesus."* (Acts 4:13).

But our present study is not intended to dwell upon the stages of growth as much as to speak of these stages to set the background for the ability and necessity of discerning good and evil. As Christians, and to be fit for the kingdom, we must learn to determine what is right and wrong, how to decide about good and evil, how to distinguish between the two. It is not always a simple matter. Being mature and fullgrown provides a great advantage, however. It is not an ability that we just automatically possess. Rather it is a quality and talent that we must develop and nurture before we can use.

Know The Difference

The only sure and certain source of knowledge about the difference between good and evil is God. We must ask of God and inquire of His Word to know what is correct from incorrect. The more we grow toward Him, the more like Jesus we become by developing the traits of character He had, the better able we are to discern. This fact should encourage us to diligently expend ourselves in Christian growth. It is essential in being acceptable to God.

Some things can easily be noted as right or wrong because the Scripture plainly and explicitly speak of them one way or the other. There are a number of veritable catalogs of sins given in the New Testament as well as lists of things that are right and good. For the sake of space we shall only note the reference here without giving the full quotations. Ephesians 5:3-6; 4:31; Colossians 3:5-9; Galatians 5:19-23; Philippians 4:8, and many others. Even those who have a very limited knowledge of the Bible are able to know that such things are either good or evil without much difficulty. We must acknowledge, however, that there seems to be such a vast number of people who do not

seem to care whether they do good or evil. But knowledge of right and wrong in these matters is not that difficult to determine.

Our Consciences

What many have not yet learned is that anything that violates the conscience is wrong. Let us be sure what the Scripture teaches. It does not teach that anything which does not violate your conscience is right. Many seem to think that so long as their conscience is not violated that whatever they do is acceptable. That is a bad mistake. While our consciences are to be our guide, they are not infallible guides. Consciences have to be taught and trained and they are no more reliable than the training received. One can be trained to believe truth is error and wrong is right and have no hurt of conscience whatever even though they do wrong. Many have sinned sincerely and honestly while thinking what they were doing was right.

But honesty demands that we live in harmony with our convictions. One who will do that which he believes to be wrong cannot please God. This is the meaning of the passage of Romans 14:23, *"For whatsoever is not of faith is sin."* "Faith" here refers to what one believes. He may believe truth or he may believe error, but whatever he believes ought to be his guide. He should bend every effort to determine whether his beliefs are according to God's Word. Fortunate is that person who has acquainted himself or herself with God's law. How deceived is that person who, lacking knowledge of God's Word, can violate God's Word and his conscience cause him no problem.

In Romans 14, Paul discussed a problem among early Christians concerning eating some meat. Some thought it was wrong to eat meat from animals that had been offered to idols, thinking they would in some way be paying homage to the idol. Paul taught them that there was nothing wrong with eating such meat unless they believed it to be wrong. If they believed it was wrong they ought refrain from eating it. To eat thinking it was evil would mean to violate their convictions and offend their consciences. What they really needed was to have their consciences instructed more clearly concerning the truth about eating meat. This Paul was attempting to do in that chapter.

Such Like

We are also taught that those things that are like what is specifically named as evil are to be shunned. When listing the works of the flesh Paul gave a sweeping and inclusive statement, *“and such like.”* (Galatians 5:21). When we may be temporarily uncertain about the rightness or wrongness of something we are to leave it alone. Similarity to sin is to be avoided. *“Abstain from the appearance of evil.”* (First Thessalonians 5:22). While this is not always easy to determine, it can be determined with a close and persistent application of certain principles and guidelines that shall be discussed later. Just here we want to establish that it is wrong to be involved in that which has the likeness and kinship of sinful things.

We need to summarize at this point before moving into the area where the discernment of good and evil is more difficult. Things specifically named to be right and wrong can be discerned relatively simply by a knowledge of the catalogs of sin in Scripture. Things that violate the conscience are wrong for the reasons mentioned. Things related to and *“like”* sinful things are also to be noted as off limits to those who would be fit for the kingdom. But we now turn our attention to determining those doubtful and difficult matters where the *“black and white”* is not so clearly defined. There are matters that are right in themselves that can become wrong if given a place in life that is contrary to the Christian priorities. But there are also measures available to the Christian that can assist him to discern even in those areas where there appears to be much *“gray”* area. It is here that we begin to see the value of being mature and fullgrown in Christ.

Value Of Fellowship

We do not want to ignore one of the real benefits of Christian fellowship is the association with more mature Christians. Those who have been in the service of the King have had experience and gained knowledge that can be used to help us know what and how to do. We should seek the advice and counsel of those who are rich in faith. Experience is a great teacher. Those with experience can see dangers as well as opportunities that others without experience cannot see. We need to take advantage of the blessing of mature brethren. Ask them and profit from what they know. They are able to discern good and evil with great precision because they know where things can lead. They have been along the way.

This is the reason God has mature men to serve as elders of

the church. For the same reason parents are to govern and guide the children. This is why older women are to teach the younger women. Those of maturity who love their less experienced brethren will be considerate, even sympathetic, with their decisions and discernments that have to be made and will lend a hand with their background of Biblical information and personal experience in living the Christian life.

Influence

We must consider the effect some action may have on others as well as on us. Influence must be considered. *"For none liveth to himself, and none dieth to himself."* (Romans 14:7). We must think how what we say and do will affect non-Christians as well as brethren, and certainly our families. We do not want to become a hindrance to someone's conversion nor a stumbling-block for a brother or sister. While we think about the affect on our own spirit and attitude toward heavenly things, we must leave off activities that will tend to dull our sensitivity regarding sin. We do not want to do things that will gradually sear our consciences and hearts and make us less interested in the things of God.

The best test might well be to simply ask, "What would Jesus do?" He is our example. The more we know of Christ the easier it will be for us to know what He would decide, what He would do, where He would go, what He would say. Cannot we see the value of studying the Bible because that is where we learn of Christ? Just think about the time when Peter had denied the Lord, and Jesus then simply looked upon him, not saying a word. Peter knew and realized so intently what Jesus would have had him to have done. When we are trying to discern good and evil and find it difficult to know just which way to turn, think about Jesus looking at you. Do you really believe He would smile on you in what you are considering, or would He be disappointed in you?.

He Watches

We are fortunate that Jesus is watching us. He is not watching just waiting for us to commit some transgression and ready to pounce upon us. He is not looking as if some warden or guard might observe his prisoners. But He watches over us in love, as a mother watches over her child as he goes about his activities.

He has the awareness and interest because He wants to guide us, protect us, assist us, and even comfort us as we journey through life. When Jesus told the brethren in the seven churches of Asia, *"I know thy works,"* He wanted them to know that He was aware of their misdeeds, but also He was aware when they faced temptation, when they overcame, when they were victorious and faithful.

The stronger we get and the more mature we develop ourselves we will be able to discern good and evil with less problems. In addition, the maturity that we can enjoy for our own benefit can be a great help to others. There are such blessings to be found in becoming *"fullgrown."*

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Lesson Ten

Continuing To Grow

This is the tenth of ten lessons on the theme of being fit for the kingdom. We have studied what it means to be a Christian, our duty in public and private worship, Bible study, the necessity of good works, applying Christianity in daily living, partaking of the divine nature, our relationship with the rest of the church, how to overcome sin and its consequences and learning to discern between good and evil. This final lesson is to encourage us to continue to grow. While it might appear so obvious that this is what we ought to do, the seriousness of it requires additional concentration.

We begin by the reminder that the plan of salvation is hearing the word, believing in Christ, repenting of sins, confessing faith in Christ, being baptized for the remission of sins into Christ, and (the part we now stress), remaining faithful to Christ. Remaining faithful requires spiritual growth. We must continue to grow.

In every realm of life growth is essential to its prosperity. It is true in business, science, industry, whatever. Things cannot be allowed to become stagnant or lie in a state of motionlessness. Things will either grow or die.

It would be of benefit if we leave the lesson for a moment and

pick up our Bibles and read the following passages and then return to these comments. Ephesians 4:10-16; First Peter 2:2; Second Peter 3:17,17; Second Thessalonians 1:3. These are a few of the passages that teach the necessity of continued growth.

Balanced Growth

Saying we must grow is not all that we need to learn. Our growth must be well balanced. In physical growth we recognize that something is wrong if only a person's legs grow but not the rest of the body. Or if only the head increased in size but the arms and legs remained as an infant growth would not be balanced or healthy. We studied the characteristics of the divine nature and saw many areas in which we are to grow. But we are to grow in such things simultaneously, not one exclusive of another.

We have tried to be realistic in this series and realize that there are hindrances to spiritual growth. This is true in mental and physical growth and we need not be surprised that such is true in spiritual growth. Some hindrances we cannot avoid but we must learn to overcome. Other hindrances can be avoided if we are alert.

One hindrance to growth is the lack of effort. Being glad over being born into God's family, we are not to expect growth to be automatic. It is not. The course of least resistance will allow you to be taken downstream. We are to work out our own salvation (Philippians 2:12). This does not mean we are to work out our own system of salvation, but we must work our part in God's system. Nor does it mean that by our works alone we shall merit salvation. We cannot earn it. But there must be obedience and this requires effort. Would it not be tragic that one failed to enter heaven simply because he was too lazy to do the work that is necessary?

A Real Hindrance

Discouragements are often hindrances to growth. Some make a fine start, but they encounter personal troubles, opposition from former friends and family, trouble arises in the church itself and frustrates them. Jobs, finances, health, school, many things can become problems to remaining faithful if we permit it to be so. But we are not justified to abandon the faith of Christ simply

because everything does not go the way we would like it. The cure to discouragement is, *"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."* (First Corinthians 15:58). Paul urges, *"And be not weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."* (Galatians 6:9).

But many "wither on the vine" due to disuse. Machinery that is not used does not retain its usefulness. It will rust, become stiff and unworkable. Even a knife, left to itself, grows dull. It stays sharp through use. If you tie your strong right arm to your side and do not use it, it will not be long before it is of no value to you. People who take to the bed even though they are well will soon become sick. Disuse is harmful. "Use, or lose" is a watchword that leaders of the church need to heed regarding their flock. Knowledge unapplied soon slips away. Talents not used will soon cease to exist. Paul told Timothy, *"Exercise thyself unto godliness."* (First Timothy 4:7). Just as having a proper diet is necessary for growth, proper exercise is also essential. This hindrance to growth can be overcome by getting busy and staying busy. Nor should we think there must always be some organized congregation-wide plan of action before we can be busy about the Father's business. Individually we can be active, aggressive in teaching, helping the needy, relieving the distressed, encouraging the discouraged, sympathizing with the bereaved, and on and on.

Interference is often a hindrance to growth. The crops in the fields do best when they are not bothered. If things are allowed to crowd them too much their growth is stunted. Plants become malformed if somebody is constantly "fooling around with them." The Christian cannot allow interference to prevent his growth. What is likely to interfere?

Priorities

We have many interest in life. Some of these interests are necessary in the daily conduct of life. All such things are not evil in themselves. It is just possible, however, that we allow such things to interfere with our faithfulness to God. It could be a job, recreation, material ambitions, associations, pleasure, vacations, even family concerns. While attending to some of these things is a part of being a faithful Christian, we can get our priorities mixed and soon find that we are "letting the tail wag the dog,"

or as one has said, “majoring in minors and minoring in majors.” We must keep a clear head and our eye single focused on the ultimate goal lest we become cloudy as to what really matters in this life. Interference from anything is a hindrance if it creates a problem for continuing to grow as a Christian. We know of a man who seemed to be prospering and who bought a nice boat. There is nothing wrong in owning and using a boat. But that boat soon came between him and faithfulness to worship and Bible study. It gradually took him “downstream” as far as his relationship to God was concerned.

Regardless of what level of maturity we might reach, there is always room for growth. We should never think we ever reach the point when there is no further progress to be made. Let us offer some suggestions for continued growth. Our prayer is these might be personally helpful to you.

Let Us Work

Be active in the work of your local congregation. There is room in the kingdom for every brother and sister in Christ. There is no unimportant person before God. There is work for each to do. We do not all have the same abilities and are not expected to do the exact same things in serving God as Christian servants. But offer yourself to the leaders and ask them for assignments. Listen for announcements that call for volunteer help. Regardless of how small or insignificant it may appear to you, get involved in what is going on. By this we mean more than attending the worship services, which is important. Be in the visitation program, teaching work, door knocking, building and yard work, fixing the Lord’s Supper, whatever and whenever you can be of assistance.

Set for yourself the goal of trying to convert someone to Christ. This will demand study of you and you may well benefit more than anyone else. But think of the possibility of leading someone to Christ! Be in discussions, ask questions, bring someone to the services and ask them their reactions to what was said and done. If they allow, tell them why things were said and done as they were. Prepare answers for subjects about which you will likely be asked. Learn what the Scriptures teach and tell somebody among your acquaintances about it. This will be one of the most productive activities of your life. Christ wanted His apostles to be “*fishers of men*.” There is some soul you can “catch” for Christ, just waiting until you start to act.

Personal Effort

Start your own personal Bible research. Study one of the books, or take some topic and search the Scriptures regarding it. A good series of studies can be made from gospel tracts, Bible study helps, correspondence courses. We encourage attendance in Bible classes, paying attention to sermons that are preached from the pulpit. But you will learn and grow faster if you have a personal program of private study alongside these things.

Sometimes people start to study and become discouraged because they think they are not really getting anywhere. But like all growth, it is gradual and great strides should not be expected. Children do not jump from the high chair and begin walking, nor suddenly stand six feet tall. While progress may appear almost imperceptible, progress is being made nonetheless.

But always keep yourself under constant self-examination. Do not allow yourself to slip off course. Like a sailor on the sea, check your compass regularly. Make application of your increasing knowledge in your personal and daily Christian life. Do what you have learned.

Businesses take inventory now and then to see where they are and where they are going. Schools give examinations. We need to take stock of our lives, where we are, the direction we are traveling. If we fail to do this we can drift either to the left or the right from truth. Self-examination helps us keep our eye on the goal. It is also one of the essential elements in continuing to grow. Someday we shall be judged and we do not want to be *"weighed in the balance and found wanting."*

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ONE OF OUR LIMITATIONS

We cannot supply back issues with few exceptions. We appreciate the fact that some may be wanted, but we print only what is currently demanded because of financial pressures. Now and then we may have a specific number someone wants, but please understand that it cannot always be provided. **JWB**

IN THIS GRACE

Paul wrote to the church in Corinth concerning a number of matters wherein they needed to make corrections and improvements. There was such sin in that church that it took strong words from the apostle to motivate them to clean up their spiritual house. Doubtless, some today would have rebuked Paul for making corrections. They have the idea that nobody ought to “judge” anybody else. Others have concluded that even though there was rampant sin and error in that church that Paul still considered them brethren, therefore, we should always looked favorably on all churches regardless of their sins. They fail to observe that Paul was warning and correcting them, not condoning them in their error nor did he expect them to continue as they were. Discipline is a prime theme of the book.

Among the admonitions Paul gave in the Second Corinthian letter concerned giving. He cited other churches as examples of the kind and quality of giving that God expected. By the time he wrote Second Corinthians many necessary corrections had been made in Corinth, yet that did not mean they could forget anything else wherein they had duties. Even though they abounded in some of the rich and cherished traits of Christianity, like faith, utterance, knowledge, diligence and love, they were to abound in giving also.

Nobody that understands Scripture believes or teaches that anyone can buy their way to heaven with money. But at the same time those who understand Scripture realize the need to lay up treasures in heaven, and accept the fact that we are but temporary stewards of certain material possessions and shall give an account to the Master how we acquired and disposed of them. Whether we abound in giving or not will largely depend on our attitude toward material things and our obedience to the commands of Jesus Christ regarding them.

We are persuaded that insufficient funds is not the real reason many churches are not doing more work than they are. It is very likely that insufficient giving is the real problem. Too much for self and not enough for the work the Lord wants done continues to hamper and hinder the saving of souls. Does not God want us to abound in giving as He did the early churches?

JWB

Tyler Nathan Boyd



The picture you see is of Tyler who was born May 8, 1986 to Carol and Steve Boyd. They have one precious daughter, Allison, and obviously are so proud of their son. Carol is the daughter of Martha and the late Jerry Nathan Corlew, for whom Tyler was partly named. Steve is one of our sons and we are justly proud of him and his family.

Young Tyler weighed in at eight pounds and eight ounces, thus becoming our third grandson and the fifth grandchild.

As all who have grandchildren well know, there is joy and thanksgiving galore when such events occur. We anticipate a good future for this boy because he has such wonderful parents. We bid a fond entrance into our family to him and pray God's richest blessings to ever abide with him. Like the others, we love him beyond measure.

* * * * *

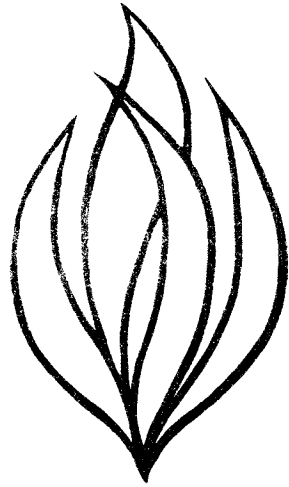
A BURNING FIRE contains sermons preached through the years, is personally financed, and distributed monthly without charge upon request as supply is available.

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A Burning Fire



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

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The Foundation Of Society

It has been said that the nearest thing to heaven on earth is to be a member of a Christian home. Those who have been blessed with such a home will agree. Christ has given principles for the home which, when followed, will make the home what it ought to be. With a prayer that after studying this lesson you may turn again to your home and put forth the effort necessary to make sure it is a Christian home, we offer this lesson.

The home is older than the Lord's church. Like the church it originated in the mind of God and is a divine institution. No home will ever be what it ought to be if there is disregard of the Founder of it.

The home, again like the church, is composed of human beings. The first home consisted of Adam and Eve, created by God, given a residence in the Garden of Eden, and from that day to this the home has been the basic and foundational unit of society. As goes the home, so goes almost everything else. The collapse of the home means the collapse of society.

God gave mankind the home for the benefit of mankind from infancy to the grave. Let us suggest three reasons why God planned the home arrangement as He did.

Honorable Birth

First, it provides an honorable birth for children. "*Be fruitful and multiply, replenish the earth*" was the command given to the first man and woman. Children born out of wedlock do not enter this world in a manner pleasing to God. This is no fault of the child, but is because of the sins of its parents. It is God's will that through the home and through holy marriage that children are born. Without this there is the spread of degeneracy and immorality that eventually destroys all who are involved, including the level of society.

Protection

Second, the home gives protection, help and physical provision to its members. Parents provide for the children. The physical necessities for each one comes through the cooperation

and work of the members of the home. We are expected to provide for our own. In sickness, health, good times, hard times, all times, we have a duty to each other to provide the things necessary in the physical realm for the sustenance of life.

Training

Third, the home is the primary training ground of the soul. Too many have wanted to shift this responsibility to the church, or even to the schools. But it belongs to the home. A child comes into the world as a piece of clay that is moldable and dependent. Children can be taught and trained to know the difference between right and wrong, good and evil. That duty belongs to fathers and mothers.

Some parents are more concerned about their child's development in sports, mental growth, physical and social advancement than they are the welfare of their soul and their relationship before God before whom they shall someday stand in judgment. At the root of the problems of many young people is the neglect of parents to assure their children of spiritual training and information from the Word of God (Ephesians 6:1-4; Proverbs 22:6).

We need more fathers like the young father who stood before the glass partition in the hospital gazing with admiration at his newborn child, and prayed, "God, help me to realize that this is more than just another mouth to feed, but a living soul to train for Thee."

Provision

The home is also the basic unit to provide for the elderly. There comes a time when the young must provide for the old, just as the old once provided for the young.

The Christian home is built upon God's plan for marriage (Matthew 19:1-12). No longer is life a matter of "I, me, mine" and "you, yours." In marriage there is to be that oneness that recognizes from "this day forward" the relationship is "we, us and ours." There is to be this oneness in the home. This oneness must extend to include both mates united in Christ.

Death ends marriage in the sight of God (Romans 7:2,3). But God does not require one to continue with a mate who is sexually unfaithful to them (Matthew 19:9). This and only this cause permits a marriage partner to divorce the mate. God's

foundation for the home is that the husband and wife enter marriage with respect for the life long existence of marriage. No court, no judge, no circumstance other than fornication has the power to dissolve marriage. Remarriages that are entered without the earlier marriage being dissolved by death or divorce because of fornication are adulterous in nature and can never be acceptable before God as an honorable home. Only the innocent party has the right to remarry.

Companionship

The home is a place of companionship. *"It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a help meet for him."* This was God's concern for mankind. God made for the male a suitable companion in the female. Many things can destroy this companionship, such as drunkenness, selfishness, failure to accept the duties of marriage. Sexual infidelity can even be the breaking of the tie.

Married people should enjoy the companionship of each other. They do not have each other forever. Ask those who have been called upon to bury their mate about companionship. Husbands and wives should live life together. Each should live in such a way that the other can admire them, desire them, seek their company. When this is done, and the inevitable time comes for parting through death, it can be said, "We had a wonderful Christian companionship together."

The Christian home is where the husband is the leader of the home. The spiritual leadership is also on his shoulders. Sad it is that so many men have neglected this most serious duty. Often it is the wife and mother who must give direction in service to God. This is not as it ought to be. A man ought to be ashamed to be so weak as to fail in what is his number one responsibility toward his family. It is far more important than physical provisions, and this does not minimize that duty. Each husband and father ought to commit himself to lead his wife and children to God through God's church. Regardless of whatever else he may achieve in life, when he does this he is a success before the Almighty. He is a failure if he does not do this with all his power and ability.

Often one parent or the other will keep the home divided religiously. This is so disturbing to children as well as each other. It brings a strain on the ties of love, respect and oneness. It destroys opportunities in training children aright. It creates

confusion and frustration and often is the means of the destruction of faith in the hearts of members of the family.

Two fathers were talking and one said, "I give my son the very best education." The other commended him for this, but added, "Do not rob him of the greatest gift you can give." "And what is that," asked the first father. The second responded, "Do not fail to give him the memory of having a Christian father, a Christian example, a Christian upbringing. No other man can give him that.

Memory

When children are deprived of having a memory of a devoted Christian father and mother they have been cheated from the greatest security, comfort, pattern, faith and confidence that they ever receive. Happy is that home where the family is led by a Christian man and woman.

In the Christian home the mother is queen. Behind every good man there is usually the encouragement, support and advice of a good woman. The influence upon children, either for good or bad, that is in the power of the mother cannot be measured because of its enormity. "The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world."

So often men who have accomplished great things have had the benefit of a mother who sacrificed themselves in the training of their children. This was their duty, and they considered it their privilege. Nor were they inattentive and negligent in performing their godly task. It is a shame when women who have borne children will not put their primary duty first and attend to the home, but seek other careers of a social, political, financial emphasis and their children denied the guidance and comfort that God intended to be provided by the mother.

The "worthy woman" of Proverbs 31 was such that her husband praised her and her children called her blessed. This could not be said if she had failed in her God-given role of wife and mother.

Let us present a few straightforward words to the young. Especially those who have reached their teen years should give heed because they are accountable before God. They ought to be Christians. The home is not what it ought to be when there are young people of accountable age who have yet refused to obey the gospel.

Be A Christian

Being a Christian means to live a life of purity in Christ. In Galatians 5 we read a catalog of sins that includes the sin of "*lasciviousness*." Not only are the young to abstain from fornication and adultery, but also reveling, riotous conduct, lasciviousness and such like. Some have the idea that because one is young he has the license to "go wild." This is not so. It is a mistake to encourage and allow the young to cultivate habits and appetites for that which is worldly and sinful. Rather, they should be taught self-control.

As for the sexual desire, it is clean, pure, wholesome and honorable. But God requires self-control and respect for this appetite. The satisfaction of the sexual desire outside of marriage is sinful. One of the purposes of marriage is to provide for this need (First Corinthians 7:2). But outside of holy wedlock that which is given by God for man's pleasure, companionship and reproduction of the race becomes an abomination. Lasciviousness and promiscuous conduct arouses the passions that cannot be satisfied outside of marriage. From such behavior the young must abstain. The deliberate creation of unlawful desire is to flirt with hell and sin against God.

Christian boys and girls ought assist each other in controlling these appetites rather than encouraging each other with temptation. It should be the goal of every boy and girl to present their bodies to their marriage partners unsoiled by sin, but pure, chaste, and void of the cheap conduct that is so rampant in society today.

Giving one's body to another outside of marriage is not a sign of love but a sign of degeneracy. Nor would one who truly loves another ever encourage the other to commit sin and damn the soul. We would urge the young to find the greatest happiness in life by following the way of Jesus Christ and "*keep thyself pure*."

Love

Home is where there is love. The source of love is God (First John 4:8). The fullest measure of love cannot exist apart from Christ. Love ties the family together. When there is love for God and His Word, love for His Son and His church, there will be love for each other. This love will make the home as near heaven as one can find on earth.

We close with this story. Imagine a young man who marries

his chosen young lady. After their honeymoon they return to their small and modest quarters and begin life together. After a while a child is given them; possibly more. The mother reads the child the Bible stories. The father leads them in spiritual upbringing. They are loyal to God in work and worship. Their hearts are thrilled as one by one their precious children are baptized into Christ. These children mature physically and spiritually, and before it seems that much time has elapsed, the children are planning marriages. Being taught to seek a mate from among the people of God, they have the determination in their heart to rear their children as they have been reared, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It is then that one can realize even here on this earth and in this life the fondest and most precious blessings of having made the home a Christian home.

From this moment forward, let us all resolve that we shall do our best to assure each member of the family the benefit and treasure of living and growing in a truly Christian home.

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The Most Important Thing In The World For Man

We are privileged to spend but a few short years on this earth at the longest. It is necessary that we get our priorities in line and learn what really matters and what is important.

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."*

By these words Solomon makes it clear what is the most important thing to man. Respect for God and obedience to Him takes first place if we have things in proper order.

Samuel once 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."*

Jesus said, *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 7:21). Closely aligned with that thought is Hebrews 5:9, *"And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."*

From these statements it is impossible to miss the conclusion. Obedience to God is the most important thing in the world for man.

Life

In Ecclesiastes, before Solomon announced the conclusion, he had presented a man's life. Verse one gave the first part of life, youth, the time one ought to remember God. In verse three he speaks of the time after youth and growing old, when the house, the physical body, shall tremble. The keepers of the house, the hands, shall tremble. The grinders, the teeth, will be lost. The eyes, those that look out of windows, are darkened and vision is less efficient. Sleep is not deep and burdens are heavier. A person begins life, passes youth, his mid-years come and go into the older days, and then, according to the natural schedule, he dies. The dust returns to the earth as it was. Mourners are heard in the streets. The cord of life is broken. The spirit no longer remains in the body.

Man might be able to do many marvelous things. He might even be able to prolong life to some degree. But death he cannot escape, even if he lives to be an old, old man. In view of that reality, Solomon concludes what is really the most important to man. Respect and obedience to God is it.

Love

Why is obedience so important? First, it is a way of showing love for God. Jesus taught, *"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment."* (Mark 12:30). *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* (John 14:15). *"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."* (John 15:14). *"For this is the love of God; that we keep his commandments."* (First John 5:3). We have seen car bumper signs that declare, "Honk if you love Jesus." Well, any ole goose can honk. You can even get a dog out of the road

with a honk. How popular would a bumper sign be that read, "Obey if you love Jesus."

Faith

Obedience is the way we show we believe Him. "*But without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*" (Hebrews 11:6). The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is a chapter of great men and women of faith. But in each report concerning them their faith manifested itself in the doing what God instructed them to do. Noah built an ark. Abraham offered Isaac. Moses chose suffering with God's people over the pleasures of sin in Egypt. Such was evident with each one mentioned in the chapter.

Wisdom

Obedience is the way we show ourselves wise in God's sight. "*Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock... And 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...*" (Matthew 7:24,26). Both the wise and foolish heard the word. Both knew the will of the Lord. But the wise obeyed while the foolish ignored.

Other Matters

Since obeying God is the most important, let us consider **some** matters that evidently some people consider minor. It matters what kind of music one uses in worship to God. Those who follow the New Testament pattern do not use mechanical instruments of music in worship, but are content to "*speak as the oracles of God.*" (First Peter 4:11). We do not have the liberty to add another kind of music to that which God has authorized. We cannot have mechanically produced music by His authority. It is just not to be found in His will for the Christian in worship. When we sing we are obeying God. By singing we show our love, demonstrate our faith, and follow the path of wisdom. It is incorrect to attempt to worship God our own way without due respect to what He has authorized.

We partake of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week

as was done by the first Christians (Acts 20:7). This memorial is given in honor of Christ. *"This do in remembrance of me."* We show our love for Christ, respect for His will, our faith in Him when we do as He and His apostles taught the Christians in New Testament times to do.

Our buildings usually have a baptistry. There people are *"buried with him in baptism"* (Colossians 2:12); buried in baptism, into Christ, into His death (Romans 6:3,4). In Acts 8:38,39, both men went into the water and both came up out of the water, the baptism taking place in between. We bury people in water because baptism is a condition of salvation (Mark 16:16). Peter commanded it of the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:48) and on Pentecost (Acts 2:38). By doing as inspired teachers taught we show our love, faith and respect for Deity.

Whose Will?

There is a difference between obeying God's will and doing our own will, even though at times that may appear to be the same. Let me illustrate. A father died and in his will he instructed his son to plant field A in wheat, field B in corn, and field C in cotton. The son considered the matter and agreed that field A was a good wheat field and so planted. He agreed that field B was good for corn. But when he came to field C he thought soy beans would be a better crop than cotton and planted soy beans. How many times did the son obey the father's will? He did not obey even once. Each time he did his own will. It just so happened that the father commanded what he wanted twice.

Many are this way in matters of religion. When they like what God declares, they will strive to go along. But when they want something else, whether the Father has authorized it or not, they *"do their own thing."* But our attitude should be, *"Not my will, but thine be done."* *"Not as I will but as thou wilt."* Obedience means doing the will of God even if others disagree, and even when you do not see the wisdom of His command. Obedience is doing what God says, the way God said do it, for the reason He said do it, because He said do it.

Rewards

There are rewards that result from obeying God's will. James 5:16 teaches, *"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man*

availeth much." Those who are God's children have the privilege of prayer. Have you ever tried to picture one separated from God, rebellious in his sins, disobedient to His commands, trying to even address God in prayer? He cannot say, "My Father who art in heaven," because he is still a child of the devil. He has never obeyed the commands whereby one is born into God's family. Can he say, "Lord, save me. I come to you in prayer

Can he say, "Lord, save me; I come to you in prayer"? But Jesus has already taught what one must do to be saved, and it is not "praying though," but obedience to the commands of the gospel, faith, repentance, confession of Christ and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. There is no way he can address Deity in his disobedience.

By obedience one enters Christ. *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."* (Romans 8:1). Salvation is in Christ (Second Timothy 2:10). All spiritual blessings are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). Only by obedience, even to the command to be baptized, can one enter Christ (Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27). We are baptized into Christ.

Obedience results in spiritual hope for the soul in eternity. Those who die in the Lord die in hope (Revelation 14:13). Those who mourn the passing of loved ones in Christ do not grieve as those who have no hope (First Thessalonians 4:13ff).

To obey is the most important thing in the world for a human being. Because man is born, only to someday die, that which provides for eternity ranks above all else. Only by obedience to God's will can such provision be made. All things pertaining to Christ are important when we realize the importance of being obedience to His will.

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ARTICLE: NEEDS HIS OWN MEDICINE

I recently publicly exposed and opposed false doctrine being taught at a certain congregation. One "loving brother" criticized me in his bulletin for not having gone to the preacher privately before opposing his teaching publicly. Of course, the Bible does not teach to oppose public error privately first. I did as did Christ

(continued on page 15)

Truth Shall Make You Free

"Then Jesus said to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31,32).

Three points are implied by this statement. One, man is in a condition of bondage due to his sin. Isaiah 59:1,2, *"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy that he cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."* Man is in sin, an unsaved state of spiritual slavery to Satan. Paul (Romans 6:16-18) spoke of how brethren had been servants of sin and were later servants of righteousness by virtue of their obedience to the form of doctrine delivered them. Man in sin is not free, but enslaved.

Two, there is a means provided whereby man can be delivered from this servitude. This is a statement of hope of deliverance.

Three, the truth is the key that unlocks the shackles of sin and bondage. Think of one bound hand and foot with chains and locks. The lock can be opened and the bonds removed but only with a proper key. Spiritually speaking, the truth of God is the key that unlocks man's soul from the grip of Satan.

It Matters

In spite of the fact that truth is the only means of deliverance, it makes little difference to some if that truth is unheard, unbelieved and unfollowed. With many, truth is not that important because they are willing to follow whatever they want, thinking that error and truth will produce the same desired results. Many have been deceived into believing a lie and still think all is well with their souls. There actually are religious leaders who contend that what you believe is not as important and being sincere and honest in whatever belief you hold. It is not too much to charge against the religious world that most denominational bodies either preach or practice just such an attitude toward the revealed truth of God. Honesty and sincerity, though essential, will not save unless that which is believed and obeyed is truth.

Just think about this attitude in other realms of life and we can see how radically absurd it is. Suppose one goes to the medicine chest and takes some pills from it, thinking they are one thing, but are mistaken about it. Will he receive the same result regardless of what he honestly takes? Or suppose a man driving headlong and sincerely down a road with the idea that he is going a certain direction and toward a certain destination, honestly and sincerely thinking he is on the right road, will he still arrive at the desired destination even if he is on the wrong road?

Knowable

Another very important fact is evidenced in these words of Jesus. Truth can be known. With so many declaring today that we really cannot be sure about anything anymore, Jesus said we can know the truth. Furthermore, unless we know it we cannot be free from the bondage that ensnares us. This idea that we all make mistakes and therefore nobody can ever really determine what is right and wrong contradicts our Lord. It is a tragedy that even some leaders in the church have adopted such stupid foolishness. To some, the truth is like looking for a black cat in a dark room that is not really in the room anyway. But that is not what the Lord taught.

But We Can!

Some people cry, "We just cannot see the Bible alike." Agreed, we do not see it alike, but that does not mean we cannot see it alike. This is the cry of religious people who try to justify the religious division in the world. Why anybody would want to justify it in view of the Lord's prayer for unity, and Paul's condemnation of division, is hard to understand. We can see it alike. One trouble is that people are not hearing it alike. So much "preaching" is so colored with denominational dogma and creeds that misapply that the truth is covered over by the doctrines of men.

There is only one way to understand a thing anyway. Everything else is to misunderstand it, unless God has given us a book that calls for unity but also makes it impossible. Some, possibly unknowingly, are blaming God and His book for the confusion that exists religiously. I may misunderstand and you understand and we are divided. I may understand and you

misunderstand and we are divided. We both may misunderstand in different ways and are divided. But when we both understand what God's book teaches we will stand united. That is either true or the very division God condemns is His own creation.

Interpretation

"But we interpret differently." This is a similar plea of those who do not really wish to be united as God teaches. To interpret means to get the meaning. Unless God has given more than one meaning, when we both interpret we will be alike. When either or both misinterpret, then we have the division and confusion. We ought be more careful than to shift the blame of man's rebellion, ignorance and division on God and His Word.

Take the matter of baptism. It is a subject that is neither difficult nor complicated. You cannot misunderstand without denominational help. When those in the New Testament heard gospel preaching they were baptized. Today so many never hear the sermons the early Christians preached and heard. So they do almost anything and everything except what New Testament people obeyed. Peter said one is to "*Repent, and be baptized for the remission of sin.*" That is as clear as can be. The word translated "*for*" always points forward to the result, never backward. Nobody was ever baptized in the Bible record because they were already saved. The word means "in order to." Here was a command that must be obeyed for sins to be remitted. No amount of "interpretation" is going to rewrite what Peter taught. People simply need to submit to the teaching and quit trying to justify some denominational code that omits it.

Again, as to the "form" of baptism, that is no heavy problem. The word "baptize" means to immerse, plunge beneath, submerge. Why should men argue for sprinkling and pouring as baptism? In these two instances the subject is not submerged or baptized. Paul taught that we are buried in baptism (Romans 6:3,4; Colossians 2:12). Why is his testimony doubted and disbelieved? This is not a matter of difficult interpretation. Just obey the teaching.

"But great scholars and preachers preach it otherwise." So what? Men often follow their own way rather than God's way. What some "scholar" may declare does not alter the Word of God one bit. Scholars have upheld just about everything and anything at one time or another. Nothing is more fleeting and temporary than the pronouncements by the "scholars." You must

remember, a few years ago (it is worse at the time of this writing) most of your great religious scholars do not have much use for the Bible anyway. They deny the inspiration of it, the Deity of Christ, the virgin birth, miracles of the Bible, creation, the resurrection, the second coming of Christ, etc. Fifty-four per cent have denied the existence of the devil twenty years ago. Even more deny him now. Heaven and hell are disbelieved by the majority of the "reverends" and clergymen. These are the same great scholars that tell you that baptism is sprinkling and pouring. Follow men to your damnation. But follow Christ to heaven. Paul warned how the wise of this world would have little use for truth (First Corinthians 3:18,19).

Why The Differences

Why are all these contradictory doctrines being preached? If people really want to know what to do to be saved, let them consult the Giver of salvation, Jesus Christ. Do not go to your lawyer, banker, real estate agent or theological doctor. Turn to your Bible and read for yourself.

Let us ask "preachers" this all important question, "What must I do to be saved?" One might answer, "Nothing. Salvation is by grace alone. Just wait and let God." He might even teach you that you were foreordained to heaven or hell even before you were born and there is nothing you can do about your destiny either way. Some do teach that.

But Jesus did not teach there was nothing for you to do. *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 7:21). Over and over and over again, the Bible teaches both God's part and man's part in God's plan for saving man from sin.

Preacher number two might tell you, "Only believe." Gospel preachers will also tell you to believe, but they will not add that denominational heresy by saying "only." James wrote, *"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified and not by faith only."* (James 2:24). Yet, men will still preach that false doctrine. Salvation involves faith, but much, much more than faith. There is obedience, without which none can claim Christ as the author of their salvation (Hebrews 5:9).

Preacher number three might tell you to repent of sins and then believe. This is an impossible twisting and wresting of Scriptures. John the Baptist told people to repent toward God

and believe in Christ. But upon believing in Christ there are other acts of obedience awaiting to be met. The preacher might tell you to “turn to the Lord” and lead you to expect some kind of direct operation from God that will give you emotional chill bumps. But the Bible never teaches any such thing as that.

A fourth preacher, taking the Bible in hand and quoting book, chapter and verse will tell you to believe in Christ (John 8:24), repent of your sins (Luke 13:3), confess your faith in Christ (Luke 12:8,9), and be baptized for the remission of sin (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38), and be added to the saved, which is the church (Acts 2:47). While others were spouting the dogmas and doctrines of men, this last preacher is telling you what the Bible teaches and telling you where it teaches it.

Why do not these preachers get together and teach the same thing? The reason is because they are not all following the same standard, the same guide, the same rule. If they were, they would teach the same thing. They would teach the truth and their hearers that believed and obeyed the truth would be made free from the bondage of sin.

Illustration

Suppose you go to the Post Office to mail a package. Regardless of the clerk that helps you, you will learn exactly what postage is necessary because each clerk looks up the rate in the same book and instructs accordingly. When men follow the Bible, omitting their creeds, manuals, feelings, catechisms, conferences, councils, prayer books, traditions, ancestral hand-me-downs, and so-called latter day revelations, they will give you the same answer. It will be the truth. That truth will deliver a person from sin. Jesus said so. Do you believe Him?

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(continued from page 10)

and His apostles.

But if it were not so serious it would be humorous because this man was condemning open criticisms before private inquiries, but he openly was critical of me and never contacted me before he did it. Does he believe what he teaches, or does he, like many sympathizers of error, operate on two standards, one for himself and another for what he dislikes? JWB

The Disciples Of Christ

"Then Jesus said to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31,32).

By the phrase disciples of Christ, we have no reference whatever to the denominational body that wears that name. This will become very apparent as the lesson proceeds. We intend to speak of the disciples which are defined for us in the New Testament.

We need a good definition of a disciple. The term is used in three ways. Sometimes it has reference to the twelve apostles, such as the time when Jesus washed the disciples' feet (John 13:5). The only ones present with Jesus on that occasion were the apostles. All of the apostles were disciples, but not all disciples are apostles.

Sometimes the word is used with reference to a learner, a pupil, one who is receiving teaching and instruction from another. In this sense it does not necessarily mean that the disciple is a Christian, but one who is being taught. Such is the use in John 6:66, when His hard sayings caused some who had been listening to His teaching to turn away from Him.

Sometimes it refers to one who has been obedient to the gospel of Christ and has thereby become a Christian. *"And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."* (Acts 11:26).

Continues

In our text we find the Lord's own definition of discipleship. *"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed."* It is significant that the Lord did not say, "If you are honest and sincere to your convictions." Nor did He say, "If you follow the dictates of your conscience and feelings." Nor did He say, "If you follow diligently the religion or faith of your choice." But only when one continues in the Word of Christ are they defined as disciples.

Continuing in the Word implies there was a coming to that Word and a beginning of service. But not only was there a beginning, but a faithful continuation of walking in the light of Christ.

It matters not how willing people are to set aside the Lord's Word in order to accomodate their own sentiments, thoughts, feelings and traditions. The Lord does not accept honesty and sincerity in the place of abiding in the Word, submissively and obediently. It is "then" that one is rightly called a disciple of Christ.

Abide

What does it mean to continue in or abide in His Word? Let the Bible speak. "*Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ hath both the Father and the Son.*" (Second John 9). To abide means to reside, dwell, stay within the confines, limits and boundaries. One cannot go beyond, add to, take from, transgress, violate the doctrine of Christ and continue to abide in His Word.

"*He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*" (First John 2:4). These are strong words and they come from the inspired pen of the "apostle of love." Please note the severity of them. If a person does not obey the Lord's commands, he cannot lay claim to knowing Him nor being His child. Rather, he makes himself a liar. To make the claim of being a disciple of Christ while refusing to abide by the authority and doctrine of Christ is self-condemning. Revelation 21:8 teaches the condemnation of all liars in the lake of fire and brimstone.

We are not pleasing to the Lord by just crying verbally to Him (Matthew 7:21). There must be the doing of His will. "*Blessed are they that do his commandments that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter into the gates of the city.*" (Revelation 22:14). We need to ask, "Upon whom are these blessings pronounced?" It is those who do His commandments.

Abiding in His Word and continuing therein necessitates the knowledge of His Word, believing and obeying His Word. Abiding in His Word is essential to our eternal salvation.

If I may set aside this teaching, ignore and fail to respect it, on what grounds do I have the right to accept anything the Bible teaches? If I can reject this positive injunction, I can reject anything I want to reject without bad consequences. If I can claim discipleship while refusing to be obedient, then how can I have any confidence in anything the Holy Scriptures proclaim? Christ says the true followers of Him must continue in, abide in,

come to and stay with His will, knowing it, believing it, obeying it in my life.

Conditional

Notice another mark of discipleship in the Lord's definition. He is speaking to Jews who already believed on Him. Yet, He uses the term "if." *"If ye abide..."* If those who teach salvation by faith only and then couple with that the doctrine that one cannot fall, and the people who teach the one doctrine usually teach both (like Baptists), then why would the Lord use the term "if"? If the doctrine once saved always saved is true, and salvation is ours by faith alone, those to whom Jesus spoke were already saved and could not fall anyway. He should not have questioned the possibility that they might ever discontinue in His Word. If such doctrines are true, then it is a foregone conclusion that they not only would continue in His Word, but could not do otherwise. But evidently Jesus thought they could cease from continuing in His Word and no longer be classified as His disciple. The truth is, one is not saved by faith alone, nor is one who is saved necessarily always saved.

The hearers of Jesus were not in heaven, yet. Before they would ever see heaven they must meet the lifelong condition of "continue in" His Word. They knew His will and had heard it. They were learning it more and more; believed on Him. But they were not in the glories of heaven, yet. They could cease to walk as He walked if they chose to do so. Jesus warns them against doing the very thing that some teach they could not possibly do anyway. Do not accept such false doctrines calculated and concocted by men.

When one considers James 2:20-24, it is evident that we are saved by faith, but when are we saved by faith? By what kind of faith are we saved? It is faith that works in obedience. A faith that does not work is a dead faith and will save nobody. Only that faith that is made "perfect," that is, whole, complete, mature, is saving faith. It is faith **with** works that justifies.

We must also consider Ephesians 2:8,9 in this connection. *"For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast."* We have the situation where Paul teaches we are not saved by works but James says that we are. Is it not obvious that these two inspired writers are speaking of different kinds of works? Since the Holy Spirit directed them both, it is

necessary that we learn the kind of which each speaks.

Paul says we cannot be saved by works of which we can boast. We cannot earn, merit nor deserve salvation. We cannot save ourselves by ourselves. James speaks of works of obedience that makes one's faith perfect or complete. Discipleship demands the doing of works. Indeed, the very next verse (Ephesians 2:10) teaches "*we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.*" There are commands to obey to become a Christian, and commands to obey to be a Christian faithfully. There is no contradiction nor conflict whatever between the two writers. Discipleship demands works of obedience.

Essential

We can never get to heaven without being a disciple of Christ. "*I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.*" (John 14:6). It is not enough to know who He is, what He taught, or even to believe it and give it mental assent. This is a necessary start. But one must obey and continue in His Word. Failure here means condemnation (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9).

"But is God so cruel as to threaten me with hell if I do not obey Him?" To answer let us imagine a moment a commander of a ship whose small son is on board. Suppose the son climbs the highest mast on the vessel and could not get down. One false step would mean sudden death. The father took a rifle and shouted the command to jump into the water or he would shoot. The boy jumped and was rescued immediately. What appeared to be the father's "cruelty" was actually a motivation for the son to do what he had to do to be saved. Here is where our trust in God comes into focus.

We must trust God completely. Our trust must be as was that of a soldier of Tiberius Caesar who was asked, "If the emperor commanded you to burn the capitol city, would you do it?" His answer was, "Yes. If the emperor commanded it, he would know that it was for the best." While we have our doubts about such submission to any man, we have none that such is the way it should be toward God. God's warning and threats are manifestations of His love toward us as much as His promises.

There are other definitions and characteristics of genuine discipleship found in Scripture. But this passage emphasizes these things that we have mentioned and we commend the

Word of Christ to every honest heart.

† † † † †

Fruits Of Excuses

Let us get a few fundamental and irrevocable Biblical facts before us. There is one way to heaven and that way is Jesus Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). The way to hell is the way of sin (Romans 6:23; James 1:15).

One can sin either by doing what he ought not (First John 3:4), or by failing to do what he ought (James 4:17). All who are accountable before God stand guilty of sin (Romans 6:9,23). This means that all stand in need of forgiveness of sins.

The gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:15). In the gospel is revealed the plan whereby God makes man righteous. Man's part in God's plan includes faith, repentance, confession of Christ and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins.

Scripture warns that most shall never enter heaven (Matthew 7:13,14). It is not that opportunity is not afforded. It is because they will not face and accept the reality of their own guilt of sin. Rather, they make excuses for their transgressions and neglect, attempting to justify their evil one way or another. Some have even said, "I know what I did was wrong, but..." and then proceed to excuse themselves as if they were not really guilty and therefore undeserving of condemnation for their sins.

It is not always difficult to establish the reason behind our sins. We might even be able to explain why we have done as we have. But there is no way to make wrong as right. There is no way to make sin as righteousness. There is nothing that justifies sin and allows it to stand as if it were not sin. All manner of excuses will have no effect whatsoever on the mind of God.

Why Make Excuses?

So what good does it do to make excuses for our sinfulness? Indeed, do we not really add to the harm and injury that sin has already caused? Let us take a look at what excuses will actually produce. We can see the value, or lack of value, of excuses

when we study the excuses people gave in Biblical records for their failures.

Consider Adam and Eve. God gave them a command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. They violated that command. When they were confronted with their sin, one by one they each attempted to justify their action by shifting the responsibility to someone else. Adam tried to place the blame on Eve, and Eve tried to blame the devil. In a measure, they were correct as far as others having an influence on them to do evil. But the responsibility rested with each one individually to do the will of the Lord and not violate His command. Nobody makes anybody else do what is sinful. They may encourage another to sin, tempting, even helping to sin. But nobody can make anybody else sin against their will. We can say "no" to sin if we are determined to do so. We cannot hide behind some lame excuse and blame it on others.

The result for Adam and Eve was that their punishment was suffered anyway because they stood condemned. Being cast out of the Garden of Eden it is evident that God did not show Himself a "mushy" God and say in essence, "Well, all right. If others led you astray, I won't hold you responsible." But God did hold them responsible. Excuses failed.

Other Failures

When Aaron formed the golden calf while Moses was on Mt. Sinai, his attempt to remove responsibility from himself when his part in this idolatry was evident proved a failure. He cried how Moses had been gone for so long a time and the people grew restless. He even lied outright about how the calf came into being, saying he simply threw in the precious elements and out came this calf. Did Moses, or God, buy that kind of excuse? Certainly they did not.

The people were made to drink foul water with the ground up calf in it. The impenitent were slain. Excuses they could multiply. But no justified reason existed. God does not accept excuses.

Moses learned that first hand when God called him into duty at the burning bush. When instructed to lead Israel out of Egypt Moses gave one excuse after another why he should not do the job. But God gave that no heed. He expected Moses to do what Moses was commanded to do.

God told Saul to go down to the wicked and idolatrous

Amalekites and utterly destroy them. He went down and won a tremendous victory over that perverse nation, but spared the king and the best of their flocks and herds, and evidently allowed many of them to escape because they reappear on the scene thereafter.

When he returned Samuel asked him the meaning of his failure to do what God instructed. He contended that he had obeyed in spite of the glaring evidence that he had not. He tried to blame the people, even suggesting that he saved their animals in order to sacrifice to God.

Samuel told him, "*Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams.*" (First Samuel 15:22). All of the excuses and attempts of Saul to escape his responsibility in bringing about this vast disobedience to divine command produced nothing beneficial for him or his people. Excuses just do not produce good fruit.

When we turn into the New Testament we read of those who heard the invitation to the great supper that was prepared for them. But, as the Scripture reveals, "*And they all with one consent began to make excuse.*" (Luke 14:18).

Does Not Matter

It really did not matter what the excuses were that were offered by those who were invited but refused to come. The fact is, they did not come and they made excuse as to why they did not come. These excuses may have seemed good enough to them, but they were not sufficient for the host.

The lesson Jesus taught is clear and plain. He has prepared the great spiritual feast for those who will accept His invitation. Those that come shall be bountifully blessed. But those who make excuse, regardless of the nature of the excuse, shall be excluded from the blessings that are offered from God through Christ. Excuses simply do not produce good fruit.

Those who preach and teach and show concern for the souls of others do what they can to urge people to come to Christ and be saved. They often are blessed in seeing someone respond favorably to the call of God. But there are those other times, heartbreaking times, when they must listen to the excuses of people as to why they should remain in sin and not be saved. It is heartbreaking, not only because it is discouraging to the soul winner, but because a precious soul, that could live with God in this life and in eternity hereafter, remains in a lost state, without

any hope, nothing in anticipation but the despair and agony of an eternal fire of hell.

Often there are those who say they agree with every vital point of the doctrine of Christ that they must obey, and even express an intention to someday, somewhere, sometime, render obedience and be saved. But for the present, they offer excuse.

These excuses oftentimes run the remaining course of one's life, and prove to be insurmountable and the spirit leave the body, unprepared to meet God. It is beyond understanding why anybody would allow any excuse to keep them away from God. Regardless of how heavy that excuse may seem, or how reasonable it may appear at first, should one leave this life to face judgment, not having rendered obedience to the gospel and lived faithfully thereafter, the nature or enormity of the excuse on which one leaned will not release him from his doom.

The Other Way

There is a better way to go. Forget excuses and simply show love for God by doing what He commands. Ridding oneself of excuses is not that difficult. If one would concentrate on the blessings and spiritual needs as much as searching for excuses why he should continue in a damned condition, he would soon see the folly of excuses and hasten to come to Christ.

Let us close this lesson by showing the unreasonableness of excuses. We can see that excuses do not produce the desired result. Suppose you wished to reach a certain destination. You knew one way had always proved to be the right way to reach your goal. Others before you had gone that way and were successful. Then there was another way offered to you, but you knew that those who traveled that road never reached the destination. Does it take superior intelligence to decide which one you ought to take?

Obedience is the only way to heaven. But who has even shown himself acceptable to God through offering excuses for disobedience?

Excuses are more likely transparent cover-up attempts of the lack of love and lack of faith in the Word of God. Admitting this lack might seem too strong to acknowledge, so instead of facing that reality, up comes some excuse to make refusal appear rational. But it never has worked for anybody, nor shall it ever. This includes me and you both.

Heaven is too wonderful and hell is too terrible for any kind of excuse to cause us to miss heaven and suffer hell.

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ARTICLE: BEWARE OF THE "HOLIER-THAN-THOU"

As the readers of ***A Burning Fire*** are aware, this booklet consists of written sermons that I have preached through the years. It will contain presentations of the truth as well as exposure and opposition to error. This is the kind of preaching recorded in the Scriptures.

Because of the nature of this effort we seldom make specific reference to preachers, churches, elders, editors, or college people by name who propagate various false teachings. There are a number of similar publications among brethren that operate on about the same position. Such publications have a place among us and serve much good.

But there are some who severely criticize papers and people who do name names and identify false teachers for all to recognize. We contend that such is both Biblical and useful. There are many brethren who do not want to become entangled with false teachers and movements that arise from time to time and the specific identification of such things is quite helpful.

But there be some who publish materials that thrash with venom anything that specifies the sources of error. They assume a "holier-than-thou" air about them, proclaiming that they do not "stoop" to dealing with brotherhood problems. They fail to realize that a goodly portion of the New Testament would never have been written if the inspired men refused to deal with brotherhood problems, naming names as well as false doctrines.

It is a shame that some seem to think that opposing error is unbecoming. Some of the timid sympathizers of error like to say that critics of error do not know "the whole story." How do they know that? Have they done their homework and checked whether they are correct in condemning those who condemn error? Just because they do not know whereof they speak, why should they think everybody is like that?

To fight the good fight of faith requires both positive and negative work. For those who are "too pure" to soil their hands to battle error, we only have pity on you. May you soon mature.

Very Revealing

The Bible contains many severe criticisms of doctrines, people, attitudes and every false way. As faithful servants of Christ we must learn to be critical of the same things, yet with the proper attitude and motive. But we are mistaken to think we are less than loving when we expose and oppose those people and positions that run contrary to Scripture.

That there has arisen a liberal tidal wave among brethren cannot be denied by anyone who keeps up with what goes on. One problem among brethren is that they do not keep themselves informed and are swallowed up in error before they even realize it. Especially should we know the inroads and innovations of digression invading the brotherhood.

But some are viciously critical. This is characteristic of many liberals who only have criticism for those who are critical of error. Never does one read or hear criticisms from them about the departures from truth being taught and practiced among brethren, but they are only opposed to those who oppose the apostasy so evident among many brethren. Is it not revealing concerning them that they do this? To defend error is sin.

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

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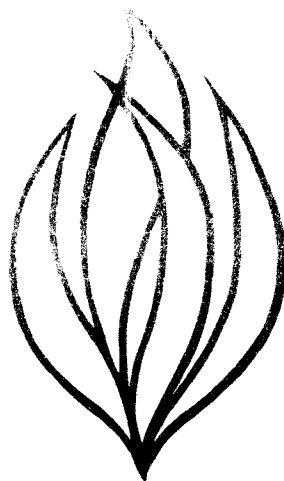
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).



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Five Facts We Must Face

Most people pride themselves on being reasonable, whether they really are or not. Most would be offended if charged with a void of intelligence. Most prefer to consider themselves as willing to accept the truth when presented. None would think it unfair, unreasonable, nothing but right, if asked to face reality. Well, on the assumption that we are all that way, rather than just thinking we are, our lesson calls upon us to face a few facts of reality. Hopefully, none of us will withdraw and hide from the truth, but rather will react and perform according to the truth.

We stand on the foundation that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative, and all-sufficient Word of God (Second Timothy 3:16,17). If one does not share this conviction concerning the Bible, then he needs to examine the evidence for this claim. The lesson will have meaning only when one does agree with the teaching of the Bible.

Nature Of Man

The first fact we must face is the dual nature of the human being. Man (mankind) is body and spirit (Genesis 1:26; Second Corinthians 4:16; First Thessalonians 5:23; Matthew 10:28). Those who believe in God do not find this difficult to accept. Jesus taught God is Spirit (John 4:24), and we are in His spiritual image (Genesis 1:26). Man was created by God, his body formed from the dust of the earth, and God made him a living soul. He is soul, in the sense of having life. He is soul, in the sense of having a spirit.

The doctrine of materialism denies the soul and spirit of man. Humanism denies that man is anything more than the beasts of the field with only physical body and nothing more. But the Bible teaches the multi-facet nature of mankind. We are asked to accept this first fact.

Death

The second fact to face is that the body dies. We need never have heard of the Bible to know this is true. In every nation, tribe, and society, this is common experience. There are columns in our papers everyday that remind us of this reality.

The Bible reads, "*Dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return.*" (Genesis 3:19). There is a time to die (Ecclesiastes 3:2). It is appointed unto man once to die (Hebrews 9:27). We need not belabor such an obvious reality.

We must say that the Bible teaches the resurrection of the body (First Corinthians 15), and it shall be a "*spiritual body.*" But we are not in a position to tell you that we understand what all that involves. It will be an incorruptible, glorious, spiritual body. Whatever else, we only can engage in speculation. But this does not affect the reality that the body dies. This occurs when the spirit separates from the body (James 2:26).

Spirit Survives

A third fact is that the spirit of man survives the death of the body. While atheists, humanists, etc, deny this, there is no doubt that the Bible teaches it. You can decide which to believe. That which offers mankind a hope for the future, a reason for existence, a divine origin of his spirit, or that which tells us we came from nowhere and that by an accident, here for no reason except to satisfy ourselves, and going nowhere anyway, and therefore, nothing really matters. Is it a hard choice?

The body dies but the spirit returns to the disposition of God (Ecclesiastes 12:7). The spirit of man does not die when the body dies. Man's physical death is not the termination of his existence. Such accounts as the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16) is sufficient to document this truth.

In a true sense, death is but one event (a major one, to be sure) in the path of man's existence. God is the God of the living. This was affirmed by Jesus concerning people like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, long after their physical deaths. Jesus approved of Martha's belief that there will be the resurrection from the dead (John 11:20-25). I cannot accept Jesus to be God's Son and deny what He taught.

So we should face the reality of our dual nature, the death of the body, and the continued existence of the soul.

Things Change

Do we find it difficult to realize the fourth fact; namely, that death changes many things? We speak of physical death. Possibly more than any other one event, many things, all things, are affected with a single event. Death marks the end of the job.

This being true, we wonder why some go at their jobs as if they were going to be there forever, even to the neglect of matters that will involve eternity. Every honorable labor and duty will cease. Your association with your family will end. You will be no longer among your earthly friends.

But death also marks the end of the opportunity to sin. Never again will one be tempted to violate God's law. At the same time, never again will one be able to tell the sinner how to be saved. Death makes the song, "Work For The Night Is Coming" more meaningful.

But death also terminates the opportunity to be saved. If one has not taken advantage of the time of mercy now extended and goes into the great beyond unprepared, he will have no opportunity again to escape hell, nor prepare himself for heaven. Of all of man's needs, his greatest need is salvation from the wages of sin, which is spiritual death (Romans 6:23), separation for eternity from God (First Thessalonians 1:7-9). God has provided a Savior, and Jesus Christ, His Son is that Savior. Unless one comes to Christ, the only way of salvation (Acts 4:12; John 14:6) while he lives in this life, death will change his time of opportunity. It will be no more. There is no second chance. There is a "*great guilt fixed*" and there will be no crossing over. If man is saved when he physically dies, all will be well with him. If he is lost, he will remain lost eternally because there is nothing he can do about it anymore.

While physical death marks the door of entrance into the spiritual and eternal realm, it makes a difference regarding the possibility of salvation.

No Escape

The fifth and final fact we must face is the fact that death will come to each one. There is no escape from it. How, when, where, and other such questions we cannot answer. But the reality of it cannot be denied. We are "here today and gone tomorrow." Tomorrow's newspaper could report your death. We write these words of warning, and before you read them death may have overtaken the writer. It is doubtful that anyone really and seriously questions that he will eventually be overcome by death, but many just will not face that reality now while they are living and do what they must do while they can do it.

In view of these five faces, what do you intend to do

regarding your eternity? Whether we want to face them or not, these facts are there. We will face them eventually. We make an appeal to your good sense and wisdom. We make an appeal to your reasonableness. Since these things are before us, should we now make preparation for them? Is not that the only reasonable, intelligent, sensible, rational, logical way? For you see, it is not a matter, "Will we face them now or later?" It is a matter, "Will we be ready to face them?"

We need not fear the future nor dread these realities. That they give us misgivings and concern is natural. But we can be glad that this life is not all there is to us. We can be glad we are not mere beasts. We can be thankfully proud that we are spirit as well as body. While we enjoy life and cherish it, we know it cannot last here on earth, but we can be glad that we have the opportunity to live forever in heaven with God and all the redeemed. We need not live life in fear and dread of the tomb, but with purpose, expectancy, assurance, comfort. We can live confidently and abundantly. And we are the ones that not only can decide, but must decide. Each one must decide for himself or herself. Nobody can decide for anybody else.

Will you face these facts now, and come to Christ?

† † † † †

God's Infallible Rule

"Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good." (First Thessalonians 5:21). This is a specific and direct command and it should be obeyed. *"Beloved, believe not every spirit but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world."* (First John 4:1). God will hold every person responsible for what he believes and practices in service and worship to God as well as for the manner of life he lives. *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."* (Second Corinthians 5:10).

God has blessed man with an intellect, the power to reason, the ability to know, understand, and with the power of choice. If we allow others to lead us astray, both we and the one who

misleads us shall be lost. *“And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.”* (Matthew 15:14). Therefore, the need to measure, and to measure by the proper rule, is of utmost concern to those who want to be saved.

The very command to prove, put to the test, try the spirits, not allow yourself to be misled, all necessarily implies there is some rule by which to measure. God has given us His infallible rule. It is unfortunate that there be many who have set aside God's rule for one of their own making. Let us look at some of the substitute rules men have used.

A Faulty Group Of Rules

“I see no harm in this or that. It seems all right to me.” With many, if they do not see any harm in it, whether it is authorized of God or not, they consider it harmless and right. But that does not prove anything to be right. That makes man's thinking the standard rather than God's rule.

“There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.” (Proverbs 14:12). Jeremiah warned, *“O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps.”* (Jeremiah 10:23). *“Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes.”* (Deuteronomy 12:8).

So many rely almost totally on their feelings, adopting the fallacious standard, “If it feels good, do it.” Poison may be made to taste like sugar, but it is still poison. Things are not always what they seem. Man is not the one to determine what should and should not be. That is an attempt to take God off His throne and replace Him with man.

“If I think something is right, it is right for me.” This rule is closely akin to the first. It is what causes people to make themselves their own god. With this kind of “rule,” if it can be called a rule, there would not be anything that is prohibited if it was pleasing to the one doing it. While it is sinful to go against what you think is true (Romans 14:23), it is not true that whatever you think is true is necessarily true just because you think so.

His Authority

Many of us have experienced occasions in teaching people

when passages of Scripture are cited and what the Bible says is noted, yet they will remark something like this, "I know that is what it says, but I really think this or that." This is simply a repudiation of the authority of God in favor of self.

Jesus said, *"They shall put you out of the synagogues; yea, the time cometh that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service."* (John 16:2). This prediction actually came to pass. The apostles and early Christians were persecuted and murdered even by some who thought they were serving God by doing it. Paul, before he became a Christian, was just such a person. He consented unto the death and imprisonment of children of God, but later said, *"I verily thought within myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth."* (Acts 26:9).

Naaman is a classic example of one who "thought" one thing, but the right way was quite the opposite. Going into Israel as a leper, receiving instructions from the prophet Elisha to go to Jordan and dip seven times, he commented, *"Behold, I thought..."* He already had his own mind settled what he ought to do, and when God's way was not his way he acted in anger until another persuaded him to simply obey God and be healed. Many today are afflicted with the same "I thought" complex that Naaman had. We have minds with which to think, but we are not endowed with the authority to determine what ought and ought not be. That is the prerogative of God. All this simply proves that what one might think does not prove his thoughts are the proper rule.

Follow Conscience?

"Let your conscience be your guide," is the cry many make. Probably more people than we could imagine use this as the sole standard for measuring whatever they do. It is true that the Bible teaches us not to go against the conscience and against our convictions (Romans 14:23). Honest people will not violate their consciences. But what is the conscience? "Conscience is that something in every person that approves, when he does what he has been taught is right, and disapproves, when he does that which he has been taught is wrong. But conscience does not teach a person right and wrong. If he has been taught that error is truth, he may practice that error with a clear conscience."

The conscience is no more reliable than the teaching one has received. History shows many dastardly deeds that people have

committed against other people with all good conscience; deeds that no Christian would condone for a moment because we know they are violations of God's law. Even Paul stated, "*Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience until this day.*" (Acts 23:1). He said this even after an earlier career of making havoc of the church of Christ. How could he have done such a thing with good conscience? It was because his conscience was mistaught at the time. Conscience is not an infallible rule by which to measure standing alone.

Other False Standards

Others will follow traditions and customs that have been handed them without ever investigating whether such things are from God or men. Romanism puts great emphasis on human traditions, as does Protestantism. But how long a thing may have been taught and practiced, or by how many, or who, does not always mean that it was correct before God.

One of the problems Jesus encountered with the Jews was their insistence on following human traditions as if they were God's law. People today are still wrestling with that same problem in principle. Our Lord condemned following the doctrines and ways of men. "*Howbeit, in vain to they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*" (Mark 7:9). Again He once asked, "*Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?*" (Matthew 15:13). It is tragic when people are so wedded to whatever was done by some who lived before them that they will ignore the revelation from God's book as to what is really God's law. Following tradition can be well and good, unless we consider human tradition to be of divine origin and consider it of God. Just to observe some tradition may be innocent enough if it does no violence to the authority and limitations of truth. The tradition we should follow is the tradition taught by the inspired apostles (Second Thessalonians 3:6).

The fallacy of following tradition can be illustrated with the following story. In a rural merchantile store the owner had used for years a stick for measuring that he honestly thought was one yard long. His father and grandfather before him had used it with the same understanding. But it was once called to his attention that it was less than a yard. Nobody ever questioned his honesty before. But his honesty was not being questioned. He honestly thought the stick measured one yard. But when compared to a

metal ruler that was surely a yard long, it was found that the stick fell short by nearly an inch.

Now the storekeeper could do one of two things. He could continue to use the short stick of his foreparents and call it an acceptable yard, or he could replace it with a stick that was truly a yard long. Since he had been honest in believing his first stick was a yard, likely he set aside the short stick he had fondly used because his foreparents had used it, and used a true yard. His honesty demanded that he do just that.

It does not impugn a man's honesty to call to his attention an error that he holds. Once it is proven to him that it is error, however, his honesty will not allow him to hold to error anymore.

The Only Measure

What then is the infallible rule that God has given? *"All scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."* (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Peter said, *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God."* (First Peter 4:11). John said, *"Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ hath both the Father and the Son."* (Second John 9). Paul wrote, *"But speak thou the things that become sound doctrine."* (Titus 2:1). We are not to go beyond what is written (First Corinthians 4:6). *"The word of the Lord endureth forever."* (First Peter 1:25). The Bible is God's infallible rule and there is no allowance for anything else.

If we are not going to take God's Word, if we think we can pick and choose what we like and omit what we dislike, if we believe we can go through the Bible like we go through a cafeteria line, taking what we want and leaving what we do not want, we are sorely mistaken. We had just as soon cast it all away because we are not showing respect for God nor His infallible rule by such actions and attitudes. We do not have the right nor the power to measure God according to our own standards.

God's Word

The Bible is God's Word. It is His revelation to man. Even

though some might say we cannot see it alike, one of two things is true: either God could not reveal His will so we could obey Him and be united, or He would not reveal His will so we could be united, even though He commands us to be one. In either case, to contend that the Bible is not God's will or that we cannot see it alike, is a gross reflection on God. We ought not blame God on man's unwillingness to obey His Word. We should hear and heed God's infallible rule.

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God Answers With The Gospel

Mankind is beset with many problems. Among them are three great plagues that trouble the human family. They are ignorance, sin, and physical distresses. In other words, man has mental, spiritual, and physical ailments.

Jesus Christ has provided the basis for the answer to all three. As for ignorance He said, *"Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."* (John 8:32). Knowledge displaces ignorance.

Again, Paul wrote, *"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners..."* (First Timothy 1:15). God provided salvation for man through Jesus Christ.

Our ultimate physical distress is that we physically die. But Jesus taught, *"Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."* (John 5:28,29). Paul wrote, *"So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body."* (First Corinthians 15:42-44).

The Bible is the only authoritative book by which man can consider the eternal future. It begins with the creation by the

power of the Eternal God. This God lives. He is the same God that loves us and makes provision for us. The all-knowing God has revealed certain matters to us in His Word, which is the inspired, infallible, inerrant, all-sufficient, authoritative Bible.

We Are Souls

We are faced with the great proposition that we are living souls. *"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."* (Genesis 2:7). Again, *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."* (Genesis 1:27). God is Spirit (John 4:24), and we are created in the spiritual image of God. We are spirits as well as bodies. We have life. We are souls in the sense of life and spirit. This spirit does not die when the body dies, but is separated from the body and returns to God (Ecclesiastes 12:7; James 2:26). We are faced with the matter of an eternal existence. This means that we shall live with ourselves always, never being rid of oneself. We have cars and we can trade them or sell them and be rid of them. We have clothing that we either wear out or discard should we tire of it. All material things shall cease to exist and we shall not be associated with them. But we shall never escape our own presence because we are souls that shall never cease to be.

Since we must live and will live, even in eternity, what can one do to assure his existence will be a pleasant one? God gives the answer through Christ. *"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days, spoken unto us through his son..."* (Hebrews 1:1,2). God answers with the gospel. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. The word power carries the same idea as our word "dynamite." The gospel is God's dynamite, great power, to accomplish for man what man needs.

We wish to present the gospel in three separate pictures, hoping this approach will magnify our responsibility before God with respect to the gospel of Christ.

A News Story

First, let us think of the gospel as the world's biggest news story. The next time you see or hear a news program, you may

be in store for some big news. Tomorrow's headlines may contain something tremendous. But the biggest news story of all ages occurred nearly 2,000 years ago. That story is the gospel, the story of the Christ who died for the sins of man, was buried in a borrowed tomb, but was raised from the dead the third day. No report to man has ever been as great as this account.

Can you imagine the impact of such an event if it was reported to have happened in our own time? What a day for newsmen, photographers, the curious as well as the serious. Everyone would crowd around every television or radio available to learn every detail. But it did not happen just recently. Nor shall it happen again. But it did happen in Jerusalem many years ago.

Unlike many news stories, this one requires something of all of us who hear it. What will you do with it? Will you lay it aside in unbelief or skepticism? Do you realize that your eternal destiny, as well as the manner of your life here on earth, depends on your reaction? Without the knowledge, belief, and obedience to the commands that this news account imposes on us, there is no way to heaven.

A Will

Second, we can consider the gospel as the will of Jesus Christ. This book, the last 27 books, is called the New Testament. A testament is a will. Christ died and he left a will concerning man. Let me tell you something about that will that affects each of us.

Sometimes people point to the thief on the cross as the way we can be saved today. They are trying to prove that salvation can be ours without obedience to baptism. It may well be true that the thief was never baptized, although there is no evidence one way or the other about that. But the thief lived and died before this will of Christ was ever in effect. Abel, Abraham, David, on and on were not baptized. But what of that? How does that concern those of us who must give an account before God according to the will of Jesus Christ that does require it?

Before a will becomes effective, the will maker must die. (Hebrews 9:16). Christ spoke words of comfort and hope to the thief while both were yet alive and the will was not yet in effect. While one lives he can dispense of his blessings any way he sees fit. But once he dies, all things are according to His will. Christ, being alive, often spoke men's sins forgiven and as far as we

know, those were not baptized. But that has no effect on the plan of salvation for me and you.

An illustration may make it clearer. Suppose a man dies leaving \$100,000 for his daughter that she can receive upon her twenty-first birthday, provided she has completed her college education and is married. At the time of his death she is sixteen. Can she demand the money immediately? She is yet in high school. She is unmarried. Is the money her money yet?

Suppose she finishes college at the age of twenty, gets married, but still lacks a few months before reaching twenty-one. Has she met the provisions of the will? She has met some of them, but not all. Not until all three conditions are met is the fortune hers.

The same principle operates regarding us, salvation, and the will of Christ. There are the conditions of faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ before salvation is ours to enjoy.

We Must Believe

Third, think about a very distinguishing and distinctive mark about the gospel of Christ. Unfortunately, there are no many varying voices being heard in religion. There are so many different churches that contribute to the divided and chaotic religious scene that only confuses people. But there is a mark of difference about the gospel that makes it stand out above all other messages. Jesus said it in the last portion of Mark 16:16. *"He that believeth not shall be damned."* Friend, we must believe the gospel.

Men may tell you that one faith is as good as another. They may persuade many that the church does not matter, that one is as acceptable before God as the next, that honesty and sincerity is all that really matters, that you can be saved in the denomination of your choice, and on and on. But the Bible truth is that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. There is one body, which is the church. There is one way to heaven which is the way of Christ. You can be saved and never accept what men teach about their churches, doctrines, morals, etc. But you cannot be saved if you reject what the Lord has taught and authorized to be taught in His name. You must believe His Word if you ever see God in His glory. The absolute necessity of conformity to the teaching of Christ cannot be demanded by any other message. But nothing compares to the God-given

gospel.

Christ has and is the answer to the problems of humanity. The Bible is God's revelation of that answer. There is no other source of teaching to which we can turn and know the assurance of what is revealed therein as we can the Bible. This great news account, this will of Christ, this that cannot be disbelieved and the unbeliever be saved, stands before each of us to decide how we will react and respond to its message and commands.

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One Of Life's Greatest Challenges

After the leadership of Joshua, the Judges, the period of the United Kingdom, then the divided Kingdom era in which Judah and Northern Israel existed side by side for around two and one half centuries, Assyria took Northern Israel away into captivity from which they, as a nation, never returned. About a century and a half later, Babylon conquered Judah and took them into a seventy-year period of captivity.

In Ezekiel 22:23-31, we read of God's description of the nation of Judah just before He allowed them to be overcome. This passage is the text of our lesson. A study of this passage and the results of the condition described therein will help us understand something of the evil and wickedness of our own day, and the consequences that must be faced if there is not repentance.

You are urged to take your Bible and read the extended passage before going further in the reading of this discussion of it.

The Man

Ezekiel, the prophet of God, lived about six hundred years before Christ. He prophesied the future of Judah, the coming captivity, and was himself among those who were taken captive into Babylon, where he continued his prophecies concerning the return. The first portions of the book of Ezekiel were written

before Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. It consists of warnings, corrections, denunciations of sin, reproofs against Judah, and the urging of repentance lest they fall.

The Land

In the text, note the condition of the land and the people. A clear concept of the conditions makes it easier for us to understand why God allowed them to be overcome.

The land was not cleansed or cultivated. Its resources were being allowed to waste through neglect, extravagance and waste. People sought rewards without labor. False teachers were in their midst, who sought not the welfare of the people but their own profit, gain, and material wealth. They were like a lion seeking his prey. Some would even cause wars to build up their own personal treasures. The wars brought sadness over the land, grief, famine, and there were many widows of the warring dead. These teachers taught error rather than God's truth.

The civil leaders were reproachable because of their dishonest gain. They exercised robbery through their governing positions, willing to shed blood for wealth and power. They used oppression to reach their own goals, just as would a wolf in the midst of his victims. They took advantage of the poor, exploited the weak, the poor were made poorer and the rich were made richer.

What could be said of the spiritual leadership, the ones to whom one might think the nation could turn for beneficial guidance in times of such stress and strain? They profaned holy things with no respect for the sacred. They led people away from discerning between good and evil, contending that good was evil and evil was good. No longer did they proclaim God's law and God was revered among them. They spoke religious lies, saying, "*Thus saith the Lord Jehovah,*" when Jehovah had not spoken to them at all.

As one reads the passage he is impressed with the sorry state of affairs physically, spiritually, morally in that land just before God allowed their enemies to grind them into defeat. The priests (verse 26), princes (verse 27), prophets (verse 28), and the people (verse 29), all contributed to the conditions. Whereas God had provided a protective wall against sin, they ignored the wall and there were gaps in the wall, breaches all around through which destruction was pouring over the land.

Punishment

God did allow them to be punished and we can see why. He poured out His indignation against them. People cannot live just any way and expect God to continue to bless them. He consumed them with the fire of His wrath, permitting them to reap what they had sown. How foolish they were to think they could repeal the law of sowing and reaping. Their ruin was self-imposed and they could only blame themselves.

God would have spared them if they had tried. It was not only God is a God of justice and their wickedness demanded there be punishment. The people rejected the way of safety by turning from Him. God sought from among the people those that would *"stand in the gap"* and fill up the vacancy of godly leadership, righteous living, and make up the shortage of God-fearing people. He looked for those who would *"build up the walls"* and called for people to repent. The breaches were large and growing larger. Who would accept the challenge to close these openings? God warned, urged, invited, and there could have been preservation from the destruction that later came upon them. But His plea is followed with the sad and ominous note, *"But I found none."* None would accept the challenge.

Application

Let us turn the pages of history forward to our own day and time. Are not the words of Ezekiel applicable in principle to us today? Let us not be unduly pessimistic but let us be realistic. Only a fool would declare that all is well in our land and the direction it has been going. We should learn lessons from history, especially sacred history, but so often all we learn is that most of us are unwilling to learn.

Consider the gods of our time: possessions, pleasure, leisure, sports, self. We seek reward without labor. We eat the bread of greed and drink the wine of lust. A truly honest and truthful man is hard to come by. A man's word has ceased to be his bond. We swim in the blood of wars and walk in the paths of fear and threat of more war daily. Homes are shattered on the rocks of divorce more than in any other civilized nation on the earth today. Both the young, old, male, female defile and defame the sacred and divine system and the God-given relationships the Creator established. The ravages of strong drink are taking such a monstrous and destructive toll among the population, and few

do more about it than just idle and hypocritical talk. Lascivious, perverted sex, murders of unborn children, the denial of the spirit of man, and such is even being taught in the educational system of the nation, private and public. People will sell their souls and the souls of their neighbors for monetary gain. Even the religious leaders are likely to be over their heads in the corruption and greediness that has become a mark of much called religion. There be those who claim to speak for God, and what they are saying does not even come close to that which God has revealed. They would not dare declare what God has said in His Word lest they reprove themselves and their wicked schemes be exposed for what they are.

It is not uncommon for pious religious leaders to defend and even promote the uncleanness of the world, and in the name of religion, for motives of profit and popularity. Some of these things have slopped over into the church as well and those who ought to stand in the gap are joining the ranks of those who are tearing down God's wall. Friend, if we be objective and realistic, this is the land where you live, the world of your age, the likely home of your children. And the majorities are complacent, indifferent, unaware and uncaring as if it does not really matter.

Then And Now

How much of Ezekiel's description (God's description) of Judah fit that which we can see around us? *"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning..."* (Romans 15:4). By what reasoning do we think that we of this land of blessings shall be the first people to repeal the law of sowing and reaping? How shall we escape, as a world, a nation, a community, a family, an individual, when we sow to the flesh? Shall we not, as Hosea wrote (8:7), *"For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind..."*?

God does not want us to suffer destruction any more than He wanted Judah to be destroyed. He is not willing that any should perish. (Second Peter 3:9). He has provided so that we need not suffer from our evil and be spiritually lost, as well as physically devastated. Even now, as in the time of Ezekiel, He seeks people, urges, warns, pleads, challenges men and women, boys and girls to *"stand in the gap"* and fill the vacancy of goodness and supply the virtue that is sorely lacking among us. This is one of the greatest challenges of one's life. It requires every physical, mental, and spiritual muscle and fiber within us

to meet this challenge. But the consequences are of an eternal nature. How many have the strength and determination to answer God's call? Cowards will not ever try.

Our Task

The Lord's people are very much in the minority. While we might not bring the world to righteousness, we do have the gigantic task of taking righteousness to the world. It is an uphill fight every step of the way, and we realize we may witness only reverses during our lifetime. The battle is often bewildering, discouraging, beset with hardships and sacrifices, even persecution, *"And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake..."* It takes more character to be a Christian than to refuse to be one. But this is God's challenge to us. When accepted, it will produce the best that is within us, enabling us to bring into reality our potential for righteousness.

In this evil day, will you dare to be righteous? In a world of sin, will you speak and act against it? Will you strike a blow for the generations to come by building foundations and providing the teaching that will preserve a remnant, from which God's truth can be proclaimed after you are gone? When all about you gives way for self and Satan in sin, will you commit yourself to live for the Savior?

This is the great challenge before each of us. Our young, as well as those older, need to have this challenge presented to them. When you accept it, and *"stand in the gap,"* doing your best to supply goodness, virtue, honor, truth, and godliness in a world that has lost its way, you can be forgiven of your sins, and can live and serve with the assurance that an eternal heaven awaits you when this life is over. Furthermore, as you live, you will know that the name of God is being exalted for those who follow to honor and reverence also.

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APPRECIATION

We are obliged to express thanks to those who have offered us kind words of encouragement, even monetary donations, toward the continued publication of this booklet.

While I do not say something about it every time, you can be confident that such means more to me than I know how to express. Thank you most sincerely. JWB

If Not God, What?

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness, because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse; because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves, who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever." (Romans 1:18-25).

God Is

In this passage Paul speaks of God, a Supreme Being, who does exist, who can be known, who should be revered. There is severe condemnation against those who refuse to believe in and worship God.

The existence of a Supreme Being is a most profound matter. The truth on that subject lies at the foundation of all of man's beliefs, his purpose for existing, his duty toward others as well as God, his salvation, his origin and destiny. The answer determines not only man's temporal and eternal happiness, but sets the standards for the welfare of the human race, now and forever.

Regardless of what one might think of the Bible, man is incurably religious. There exists no people who are not religious in nature. Everywhere the human family has been found they are worshipping creatures. Constantly the human looks toward a Supreme Being. Mankind strives to be as that which is worshipped and like that which the worshipped one wants him to be. What one thinks of his God, even if he has gods of his

own making, is going to be a basic determining factor in what he will be, wants to be, thinks he ought to be. Even those who deny there is a Supreme Being have erected, in their own minds, that which is their governing measure.

Christians believe in the God of heaven as is revealed in the Bible. The evidence sustains the claim that Jehovah God is the only true and living God.

Can Be Proved

Sometimes we are asked, "Can you prove the existence of God?" The answer is assuredly, "Yes." His existence is proved by the same process that many other things are proved; namely, by the evidence.

We may not be able to convince everyone that God exists. We will not likely convince those who are determined to disbelieve regardless of the evidence. But we learned long ago that there is a difference between proving a thing to be true and convincing some people to accept what is true. Yes, there is evidence to prove that God exists that cannot be refuted, even though many efforts to refute Him have been attempted.

But our lesson wants to focus on this matter in a way that is somewhat different from the usual approaches to proving the existence of God. We want to consider the question, "If God does not exist, what are the alternatives open to man to accept?" One either believes in God or he does not. What options does an unbeliever have?

The atheist flatly denies that God exists. He asserts with great confidence, "There is no God." But can we with confidence blindly accept his assertion? What does the atheist have to offer mankind?

Denials Prove Nothing

To believe there is no God does not demonstrate that there is no God. Until one can prove there is no God there is always the possibility the unbeliever is mistaken. In order to provide proof, one would have to be everywhere at the same time, know everything, have all power, indeed, he would have to be the very Being he denies exists, lest he might have overlooked something somewhere.

To simply not see God with the physical eye does not disprove His existence. We all readily accept the reality of many

things that we cannot and do not see. We do not see radio beams, germs in the air, even distant places we have never visited. The blind man does not see the sun, but does that mean there is no sun? The deaf hear no sounds, but is sound non-existent? We all know the answers to such questions.

But someone complains that there is evidence that such things as those do exist. That is exactly the same reason we can know that God exists. We see the evidence. *"The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth his handiwork."* (Psalm 19:1).

Consider the immense size of our universe, the precision of it, the design, the seasons, the rotations, the inter-working of many systems that are interdependent on one another for existence. Consider the reality of the existence of mind that cannot be produced from matter. All these things indicate a designer, a mind, an intelligence, a power, that surpasses anything man can fully contemplate. There is no foundation for the doctrine of atheism, but the abundance of evidence for the existence of God is all around us.

There Is Evidence

If one saw footprints of a man across the sand he has evidence that a man was once there. There are "God's footprints" everywhere. Atheism can offer man no reason for existence, no purpose, no origin, no destiny, only the grave, no hope, but utter and ultimate nothingness. Who can consider our world for very long and believe it amounts to naught?

The atheist may turn a bit from his outright denial of the existence of God to another position called agnosticism, a position of doubt, where one admits he really does not know one way or the other. But in reality there is little difference between an agnostic and an atheist. Neither acknowledges the reality of the existence of God. Both must turn away from the evidence in our world as we have mentioned. They must assume that because they do not know something that nobody else can know either. While admitting they do not know, everyone must admit that there is much concerning God that we, limited and finite creatures, do not know of Him. But one does not have to know everything to know something and that for sure. I may not know all the matters involved in the operation of an automobile, but there are some things I can know and can take advantage of the benefits even of that of which I

know nothing.

Men have not yet learned all there is know of electricity, the atoms, any number of things. But there are some things they can know and know them for certain.

Is There No "Oughtness?"

Like the atheist, whose position would mean there is no authority, no standard, no ought and ought not, the agnostic position would make civilization impossible if actually applied. There would be no laws, no rules, no obligations, nothing. Surely, we can see that any believe that destroys everything and builds nothing is not much of an advancement and offers no promise to the human family.

The atheist and agnostic might turn slightly and become what is called a materialist. The materialist believes that even spiritual matters are the result of material circumstances. Matter is eternal to them and the spirit world, which they do not totally deny exists, someday, somehow, sometime was produced from spiritless, mindless, dead matter. Who can believe it?

Origin Of Life

The philosophy that life springs from non-life has never and can never be demonstrated. Such has never occurred. Science has proven that matter is not eternal in nature. It had a beginning. From whence came matter? Mind cannot come from matter. Matter has not always existed. It is easy to see that matter was produced by mind, not mindlessness. There is explanation for the existence of the intellect or thought in materialistic philosophy. The entire theory stands or falls on the origin of life, and materialists have no observable, proveable, demonstrable answer. Their "explanation" is fantastic and rings somewhat after this order. Matter existed (which science has disproved and materialists cannot explain from whence it came), but this matter exploded, and out of that explosion all things have gradually developed and evolved, even life itself and all forms of life, even though we cannot show and do not know how it could come to be.

People usually recognize a fantastic and absurd tale when they hear one, and nothing is more of that description than the "explanation" of the materialist and evolutionist regarding the origin and development of all things, including life.

If No God

What if they are right? What does that do to man except reduce him to nothing more than an animal like other beasts of the field? Even if the materialist is right that mind sprang from matter, he has no evidence concerning the origin of matter, which is not of eternal nature itself. In spite of all the claims and assertions concerning the "fact" of evolution, there is no evidence to prove it and, the truth is, what evidence we do have "for" evolution as often as not contradicts the evolutionary hypothesis. Believers in God and the Bible need have no fear not submit to the attempted intimidations by the alleged "scholars" who would deny the reality of God and the Biblical account of origins.

Materialists have enlisted the "bandwagon syndrome" to sustain their cause. They would create the impression that anybody that knows anything accepts what they affirm. According to their line of "reasoning," if you do not agree with them then you are terribly inferior and are contending against the "majority" thought of the day. To which was respond, "So what?" Where is there evidence that the majority is right? Why should we follow some blind path simply because a lot of self-acclaimed experts, who have neither proof nor sufficient evidence to uphold their claim, say that we must go that way?

Scripture teaches, *"The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God."* (Psalm 14:1). Follow a fool if you want, but at least be fair enough to yourself to admit that is who you are following and what you are doing. When you reap the fool's reward, do not blame anybody but yourself.

The bottom line of the doctrines that would eliminate the existence of God is simply a system of every man for himself, no law, no authority, "do your own thing," no right, no wrong, no ought, no ought not, everything is beautiful in its own way. We are here for no reason, having come into existence by chance and random, going nowhere, and life and all the world around us amounts to nothing, is for nothing, and the best we can say of ourselves is that we are highly developed animals. Just how this is supposed to provide a foundation for "human rights," the dignity of man, respect for human life, and uplift mankind and make a better world has yet to be explained.

Truth Is Better

But the faith and contention of the Christian offers a better way, a more excellent way. In philosophy there is the consideration of things and the effect of things. There must be evidence to prove cause and effect. The Bible and nature both provide evidence that God is the ultimate Cause.

Science is classified knowledge, gained and verified by observation and demonstration. The only verified knowledge we have, that which has been observed and demonstrated, agrees with the contention of the existence of God. There is not one scientific fact that anyone must deny in order to believe in the reality of God and what the Bible says and teaches. Evolutionists cannot make that claim for their doctrine.

Faith

Faith is not just a "leap in the dark" and a pious wish for things to be as we want them to be. Faith is based on evidence. God has provided evidence for our convictions, including the existence of God. This evidence is seen in our world, the very world He made, and in His Word, the very Word of which He is the author.

Without God nothing can be explained. With Him all things not only have an explanation, but a meaning. We are creatures of choice. We can be atheists, agnostics, materialists if we choose. But we can show ourselves wise rather than foolish and choose to be a Christian.

When a man will be objective and fair, honest with the evidence and sincere, will consider the evidence before him that is available, he will believe in God, the God of heaven and earth, our Lord, Creator, Sustainer and Judge.

† † † † †

A Mark Of A Sympathizer Of Error

When error is taught there arise those who love truth and are set for its defense who will oppose it. This is as it should be.

But those who defend truth against error are often the targets of attack by those who really never get disturbed about false doctrines, but can get terribly aroused over their misperceived and opinionated judgments about the methods and manners of those who oppose error.

If brethren would get that concerned about error they would show themselves more loyal to truth.

What Kind?

The Bible student knows we are not saved by works. But at the same time there are works by which we are justified or saved (James 2:24). Even faith is a work (John 6:29). There are different kinds of works. We cannot be saved by works of our own righteousness, or works of which we can boast, or works of the Mosaic Law.

But there are works of obedience, conditions we must meet before we can receive the gift that God gives us. Works of obedience are not a way to earn salvation, but to receive salvation.

We are saved by faith and the Bible student reads this over and over again. But as with works, there are different kinds of faith. Weak faith, dead faith, mere mental assent or belief does not save. The faith that saves is the faith that obeys. We learn what "*by faith*" means when we study Hebrews 11. In each instance, without exception, the blessing and benefit given to those noble characters was by faith, but without exception they did what they were commanded to do.

There probably is no doctrine more deceptive and misleading, but at the same time more universally taught among denominations than salvation by faith alone. It is the devil's lie.

How we yearn for and glory in having peace. Jesus came to bring peace. But what kind of peace did He bring? There are different kinds of peace just as there are different kinds of works and faith.

Some have mistakenly thought the mission of Christ was so everybody will get along with each other. At best this is but a by-product of the peace that Christ brought. Rather than assuring us that everybody will get along with each other, Christ brought a sword, not peace. The reason is because there are those who will follow Him and those who will not. There is the inescapable controversy between those two groups of people.

Many have sold their souls by compromising the truth in order to have peace with other people. But the peace Christ brings is peace with God. The barrier of sin is removed by man being forgiven and those once alienated are reconciled to God through Christ. This is the peace He brought and the peace for which we must strive.

When we read of something in Scripture, let us be careful and understand what kind of something God has in mind.

Justified Four Ways

A person may be accused and charged with violating a law and be justified (set free, without penalty) four ways. (1) He may be found innocent. Being not guilty he goes free. (2) There may be considered a sufficient reason, such as speeding due to a health emergency. He goes free. (3) He is found guilty but not retained because he pays his own fine and is allowed to go. (4) He is found guilty, cannot pay his fine, but another steps forward and pays the penalty for him. He personally deserved punishment, but because another has paid in his stead he is delivered and goes free.



JAMES W. BOYD

Regarding man and being set free, justified, from sin, there is only one way. He certainly cannot be declared innocent for we all sin. Who would think there is any sufficient reason for man to violate the law of God? We cannot pay our own penalty because we do not have the power to save ourselves by ourselves. But we can be free from sin because Jesus Christ paid the penalty for us at Calvary.

We can partake of this benefit offered us when we obey the gospel of Christ. Until we do we stand condemned to suffer our own ruin.

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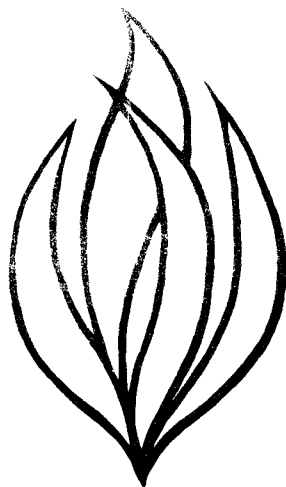
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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).



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The Beheading Of John The Baptist

A reading of the text, Matthew 14:1-12, is necessary at the start of this lesson. We trust that the reader will turn to his Bible and consider that text before continuing. It is not expedient to copy that lengthy passage here since one can readily read it from his own Bible.

Now that you have read the text, we suggest that there are some basic truths and principles in the actions surrounding the death of John the Baptist that we should study, learn and apply.

This Herod was Herod Antipas who became king of Galilee after the death of his father, Herod the Great. On a journey to Rome this Herod met a woman named Herodias who was the wife of his brother Philip. He persuaded her to leave Philip and marry him, and to this she agreed.

John the Baptist had been preaching concerning the coming of the kingdom and the necessity of repentance, how men must forsake their evil actions and relationships and prepare for the coming of the kingdom. His preaching of moral purity had been offensive to Herodias and Herod because he told them they did not have the right to have one another. *"It is not lawful for thee to have her."* In their anger Herod had John put in prison.

It is noteworthy that if some today had been preaching to them, they would have been told to repent but that it would be all right to continue in their adulterous relationship anyway. It is astounding that such false doctrines are even being taught among brethren.

Some have suggested that the sin of Herod and Herodias was the kinship between them, she being his niece, and that is what made the relationship evil, not their adulterous marriage. But the problem remains. Could they continue in that evil relationship after "repentance?" This is what some are teaching. It is false. Herod and Herodias may have been unlawful for any number of reasons, but their marriage was adulterous and they did not have the right to continue therein.

Fearless

John the Baptist was a fearless preacher. He had proven his

courage by his strong rebuke of the Jewish leaders (Matthew 3:7-9). He had warned the Jewish nation that they must repent. He even condemned the evil of the king. In doing so, he was not only preparing the way for the coming of the Lord, but was also upholding God's marriage law which had existed since the creation of marriage. There was no justification for the dissolution of the marriage of Herodias and Philip. Herod and Herodias were in sin.

John demonstrated both a fearlessness and a love when he preached to Herod and Herodias the message they needed to hear. It was not what they wanted to hear, however. John could have preached to them many things that might not have been offensive to them. He did not deliberately offend, but he taught them the truth and the truth was offensive to them. He showed a genuine concern for their spiritual welfare. If he had not loved the souls of these two sinners he could have dodged what they needed to hear for more acceptable topics.

Go Away - Lost

It is a sad commentary on much that is called preaching today that those who are lost can listen to the preacher time after time and still go away time after time in comfort and consolation as if all was well with them and God. They do not hear lessons they need to hear. They are often entertained. Possible they will hear lessons on love, grace, kindness, the beauty of nature, heaven, etc., and these must be preached. But when that is the steady diet, and sin is not condemned, and the sinner is not discomforted in his sins, and the way of salvation is not explained, then the preaching is lacking a basic ingredient that God expects and that hearers deserve. Many "preachers" will shy away from sermons on worldliness, slothfulness, hell, lasciviousness, modesty, even the specifics of the terms of salvation lest they might "rub somebody the wrong way."

Notice John's method of approach in his preaching. It is not too hard to condemn those who are considered "minor" characters. Some are quick to condemn the errors and sins of "lesser" people. But let somebody of rank, power, influence, position, whether in or out of the church, be the guilty ones, then the voices of some become mute.

Some will stand before a large congregation and condemn sin generally, but when it comes to confronting one personally and individually with specific violations of God's law, then they stop

short. Some will not ever preach publicly against specific sins in any way. We need more preachers and teachers who will be as was Nathan, who told David, "*Thou art the man.*" It may not always set well, and it may not be the way to financial increases and long terms of service at a specific congregation, but how can one think he has done his duty if he will not do this? John's rebuke of sin was specific, personally applicable, and given to the most prominent of the land.

Not Ashamed

Neither was John apologetic for his preaching. He knew what he to do and did it. It is told about Sgt. Alvin York, hero of World War I from the mountains of Tennessee, when asked why he risked his life so often in battle, he responded, "I seen my duty, and I done it." The cause of Jesus Christ would be greatly strengthened if more were of that frame of mind.

How do you measure the result of John's preaching to Herod and Herodias? As far as we can tell, none were baptized. No hearer was converted. All that heard the message, especially the ones to whom it was so applicable, were outraged at the preacher. He was thrown in prison. If such was the result of a gospel meeting today, would brethren consider it any success?

But it was not a loss or failure. Upholding the truth is never loss or failure regardless of reactions. When a person does his godly duty there is victory and success whether it pleases or displeases others. We still have before us an example of the kind of preaching and the kind of preacher that God wants. How can that be marked off as failure? As Paul said, "*Therefore, my beloved, be ye stedfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*" (First Corinthians 15:58). John's work was not in vain because he did what he was supposed to do.

Truth Remained

Take note that the imprisonment of the preacher did not change the truthfulness of his message. Men thought by destroying Jesus that it would crush the truth He brought. But rather, that was but another giant step in the plan of God's system for saving man. Men have persecuted the church and expected that to dispense with its message. But truth rises again and again. Even in our own time many have thought that

“moving the preacher” will in some mystical way remove the truthfulness of the sermons he preached, that were disliked. Inventive schemes have been concocted to discredit messengers because of hatred toward the message. But do what you will with the messenger, when the message of truth is truly the truth it remains the truth. Putting John in prison, even killing him, did not change the fact that Herod and Herodias were in adultery and they had no right to each other.

We do not know how long John was in prison before his death. What brought it to reality was Herod’s birthday celebration at which time, Salome, a daughter of Herodias by a former marriage, danced before the sensuous, drunken, revelling king and his princes. He was so pleased that he intemperately, extravagantly, offered her even half of his kingdom. But her request was as her mother had ordered; namely, the head of John.

Herod was sorry about her request, not because he had any real concern for John, because he would have had him killed before this except he feared the reaction of the multitudes that considered John a prophet. But now, before his princes, and facing his pride, he could not change his offer to Salome and he had John beheaded. Herod is not the last to have bowed to do evil because of the pressures around him.

Scripture does not reveal it, but tradition says that when Herodias saw John’s head she shouted, “You will never tell me that I am unlawful again.” If she did say this she was right about John never saying anything more about her sin. But she was more in sin now than ever before John died.

Progress Of Sin

In this entire procedure we see sin as it progresses and becomes worse and worse. It began with lust between Herod and Herodias. It continued in their adulterous marriage. It grew through the revelling of evil people, sensual dancing, drunkenness, all such things being companions in vice. It produced revenge, hatred, eventually the murder of this man of God.

The beheading of John closed his earthly life, but his reward shall be an eternal one. Jesus said, *“For whosoever shall save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s the same shall save it. For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul? Or what*

shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:35-37). Though it be difficult to consider, there are many things far worse than being put to death for righteousness' sake. Surrender of the truth is a far greater calamity.

Greater Than John

Consider two final thoughts. There is one greater than John. Even John preached, *"But he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear..."* John was great, but even his greatness pales in the brilliance of Christ. John preached, *"He must increase and I must decrease."*

But Jesus also spoke of John. He made an amazing statement. *"What went ye out into the wilderness for to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? Behold, they which are gorgeously appparelled, and live delicately, are in kings' courts. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and much more than a prophet. This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee."* John was not only a prophet, but the forerunner of Jesus Christ, and one through whom divinely given prophecies were fulfilled.

But Jesus continued with an astounding observation. *"For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist; but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he."* (Luke 7:24-28).

How can it be that those in the kingdom are even greater than John? It is because John was never in the kingdom. He was beheaded before the kingdom he foretold actually came. The kingdom is the church. Jesus was still predicting and promising the establishment of the church or kingdom in chapter 16, after John was already dead. Those in the church are greater than John. This is not because of our personal greatness, but because of the greatness of the church and the greatness of Christ, the head of His body, the church.

To be ranked far beneath John is our expectation. To even be considered great as John is unthinkable. But what do we make of the statement of Jesus of even being greater than John when in the kingdom? Can there be any doubt about the value our Lord places on being a member of His church? In view of that utterance, how can any refuse to become a member of the body of Christ by obedience to the gospel?

Great truths are presented in this account of John's death. Great hope and promises are offered by Christ through the church. Let us learn these lessons well and conform our lives accordingly.

† † † † †

Christ, A Rock Of Offense

"As it is written, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and a rock of offense: and whosoever shall believe on him shall not be ashamed." (Romans 9:33).

In this passage we have expressed how Jesus would be considered by unbelievers as well as what He would mean to believers. Paul is quoting from Psalms and Isaiah. He had been expressing vindication of the right of God to cast off the favored position of the Jews as a nation and to offer the gospel and its blessings to the Gentile world as well. God now extends His favors of fellowship, once exclusively enjoyed by the Jews, to the whole world. These favors are extended through the gospel message.

Christ came to save both Jew and Gentile, both those that were near and those that were afar off. A characteristic of the gospel is that the gospel is for all. *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* (Mark 16:15). It is most unfortunate that the Jews, as a nation, refused to accept Jesus as the Christ.

Rather than believing on Jesus, He was a hindrance to them. They looked upon Him as a stumblingstone, something offensive. Everything He did and said was an offense to them. It is not that God deliberately made Jesus offensive to the Jews, but they made Jesus offensive to themselves because they would not obey God's teaching regarding salvation.

An Offense

Paul says that Jesus was a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. Why was Jesus so offensive to the Jewish people? One reason was because of the lowly circumstances surrounding His

birth and His early appearance in the world. He did not meet their pre-determined standards that they set for their king. His parents were from the despised city of Nazareth. He was born in the humblest of environments, in a stable, and a manger for His bed. He did not possess great properties and was not one of earthly glory and worldly power.

They were offended because of the nature of His kingdom. They wanted an earthly potentate that would challenge the rule of Rome and bring them into the former glories as that which characterized the reign of David and Solomon. Jesus offered no such kingdom, although they first thought that He might. He headed no army, but He preached submission to the powers that ruled the world as long as they were not forced to disobey God. He solemnly declared that His kingdom was not of this world. His kingdom was not an earthly form of government. It is regrettable that there still be many who, like the mistaken Jews of old, still think Jesus is going to be an earthly king, ruling from Jerusalem. They fail to understand and appreciate the spiritual nature of His kingdom.

The Jews were offended because of the frankness and plainness of His reproofs of their wickedness. They were a self-righteous lot, thinking themselves to be in a special class by virtue of being the descendants of faithful Abraham. They refused to accept the teaching that others, as well as they, could be children of God.

Love Sin -- Hate Christ

Their religion was often mere lip-service, but void of genuineness and sincerity. When Christ firmly exposed their hypocrisies and rebuked their deceptions, they retaliated. When He spoke concerning sin He did not do so with sugar-coated words that would soften the displeasure of God toward evil. Rather, He expressed and demonstrated an intense hatred against evil. Therefore, those who loved sin and practiced it learned to despise the Lord rather than profit from what He taught.

They were also offended at His mercy toward those upon whom they looked with contempt and inferiority to themselves. Jesus ate with publicans and sinners. He showed God's love by His actions to all people of any race and nationality that would reverence God. He forgave the harlots, spoke tenderly of even the most noxious of people when they were penitent. The Jews were unforgiving and brittle in their legalistic religion. They

would hold grudges against those they disliked. It was quite a contrast between them and the merciful and forgiving Son of God. As a result of this difference, Jesus was offensive to them. They stumbled over Him. Christ did not satisfy their expectations and demands.

But notice what Paul says of the meaning of Christ for believers. They *"shall not be ashamed."* Possibly there have been times in your life when you were embarrassed either by your own conduct or that of someone around you. Parents have sometimes been shamed by the behavior of their children. Children have often been given reason to be ashamed of their parents. Brethren are sometimes ashamed of one another because of the anti-Christian behavior that corrodes the life of some brother or sister in the Lord. But those who believe in Christ will never have justified cause to be ashamed of Him or shamed by Him while they are faithful. Never is there need to be ashamed of the faith of Christ.

Precious Stone

Peter wrote, *"To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious... unto you therefore which believe he is precious; but unto them which be disobedient, 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 they were not appointed."* (First Peter 2:4,7,8). The very stone that God placed as the cornerstone and the standard by which all else is to be erected was cast aside by the Jews.

Peter encouraged brethren, *"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."* (First Peter 4:15,16). Rather than suffering shame because of Christ, we can experience happiness, humble pride, success and joy to the fullest possible, in Christ.

Paul was proud to be a Christian and a messenger of the Lord's will. He wrote, *"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."* (Romans 1:16). Those who are ashamed of Christ will be ashamed of His doctrine and vice versa. Some are embarrassed before the world

because of it and ashamed to be known as one who professes to be His disciple. They are intimidated by those who look upon Christ contemptuously.

But the true follower of our Lord will gladly uphold every point of doctrine Jesus taught and authorized to be taught in His name. He will strive to abide by every direction and labor to live in accordance with every word as well as the spirit of His message. We need to let all men know that we are Christians, not for our glory before men, but that Christ may be glorified and His will be exalted. In face of all odds and whatever the consequences, we must fear not to be identified with Jesus, nor dare we withdraw from taking a firm and determined stand for the truth He delivered.

Be Not Ashamed

We will not be ashamed to tell others of Christ and His scheme of redemption. We will profess and confess Christ and His way even though it may cost us fame, fortune, power, prestige, popularity or whatever. We will never compromise the truth for the pleasure of any. Jesus said, *"Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."* (Mark 8:38).

To be proud of Christ extends to being proud of those who follow Him. We will not draw back from our faithful brethren because of race, education, background, social status or economic condition. It is unfortunate that all of us do not live in such a way that all the rest of us can be proud to call each other brethren in the Lord. There are times when there is reason to be ashamed of sinful conduct and attitude exhibited by one another. But we should never be ashamed of any fellow citizen because of certain worldly and arbitrary standards. Some have shown themselves ashamed to be Christians if the building is not outstanding on the right side of town, attended by the worldly prominent and the financially well-to-do. So often such churches have brought the cause of Christ into worldly compromise anyway.

Being proud of Christ may bring us into many circumstances that are designed to humiliate us. But eventually, those that are poor shall be rich in true riches. Those that are humbled and downtrodden shall be exalted and glorified. We ought to want to

be their number. "*Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.*" Can you possibly consider how important that is when we are present at the judgment? This is the Lord's message of hope and consolation to His disciples.

Rejectors of the Lord shall be cast away to perish eternally. Woe unto that person that cannot humble himself to take into his heart the only Savior that is provided. The eternal bliss and peace for the believer is certain and sure. He stands on the Rock of Ages rather than on a rock of offense. Christ, the stumbling stone to those that disbelieve, is the stepping stone into glory for those that believe.

† † † † †

When God Repents

Do you believe in the reality of heaven and hell? The Bible makes it clear that such exists. Both are real. We need to consider a matter that will help determine our eternity in heaven or hell. Few subjects are more important than the one now under consideration.

Please turn to your Bible and read Jonah 3, then we shall proceed with the lesson. The account rendered there must be clearly in mind before we can grasp the lesson we intend to learn. Does God repent? When does He repent?

When we think of repentance we usually think of a sinner turning from his sins. But a sinner is not the only one that can and does repent. Even God repents. In Genesis 6 we read how He repented of having made man. But when does God repent?

Repentance, as it relates to man, means to turn, to have a change of purpose, a change of mind, a change in direction and intention, a resolve to be or do differently. Actually a person can repent from good to evil just as we usually think of it, repenting from evil toward good. We generally think of repentance in this latter fashion, changing our minds from sin to righteousness or from the devil to God.

Motives

Three things motivate man to repent of sins. "*The goodness*

of God leadeth thee to repentance." (Romans 2:4). God's love for man and man's response to God in appreciation for that love causes a person to turn from the ways of the devil to the way of the Lord.

"For godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation." (Second Corinthians 7:10). Repentance is not sorrow, but is motivated by sorrow. Repentance is prompted when a person realizes he or she is grieving God because of his or her sins. He becomes sorry for this and decides to turn from his sins.

A man's faith in the Almighty will urge him to change his mind also. The faith that saves is the faith that obeys. We must obey the commands of God. *"And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent."* (Acts 17:30).

Repentance leads one into paths of righteousness, a better way of living, a purer, more Christ-like life, the life of obedience. A reformed life is the result of genuine change of heart. It is the fruit of repentance.

Repentance is vital to a person's spiritual salvation. It is one of the conditions for forgiveness of sins. *"I tell you, Nay, but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."* (Luke 13:3). The rule is that man shall perish. But that rule has an exception. Repentance is the exception.

"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38). *"And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."* (ALuke 24:47). *"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but us longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."* (Second Peter 3:9). Can anyone misunderstand the necessity of repentance?

"Except Ye Repent..."

To fail to repent means a person remains lost. One will not hesitate to be baptized when he has genuinely repented because baptism is a command of God, and when we believe God we will obey God. One who has genuinely repented will not forsake worship, deliberately sin, disdain opportunity for doing good. He will not continue his sin, nor be content to remain in a sinful state and relationship. When one repents, as God expects, he surrenders his will to God's will, and will go God's way.

Unfortunately, the need of repentance is a stumblingblock which will keep many out of the glories of heaven because they will not turn nor change their minds to do God's will.

The Bible also speaks of God repenting. Of course, God does not turn from sin because God does not sin (James 1:3). While Jesus was on the earth and in the form of man He was tempted as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:15). Deity does not have to turn from sin. It is not a sin to be tempted, but it is sin when one yields to temptation.

God has changed His mind concerning certain things. In First Samuel 15:11 we read where God changed His mind about Saul as king of Israel. God made Saul king, but Saul was wicked. When Saul showed his wickedness God changed His mind about Saul and his family remaining on the throne.

In Exodus 32:14, Israel was in the wilderness and worshipped the golden calf. God decided to destroy them. Moses pled for them and God changed His mind and did not destroy them.

While God does change His mind, He does not do so without cause. Saul's wickedness caused Him to change His mind. The plea of Moses caused Him to change His mind. God is not fickle nor unstable, jumping back and forth. But on certain conditions He has and will change His mind.

God has shown us in His Word, *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die."* (Ezekiel 18:20). *"The wages of sin is death."* (Romans 6:23). If we obey not the gospel we shall be punished with eternal punishment from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9). The workers of iniquity shall not inherit the kingdom of God, but shall be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (First Corinthians 6:9,10; Revelation 21:8). Everyone who is accountable before God has sinned and shall stand before God in judgment (Romans 3:23; Second Corinthians 5:10). Unless God changes His mind toward the sinner the sinner is doomed.

When

God can change His mind when certain conditions are met. When does God change His mind about the eternal condemnation of the sinner? The story in Jonah 3 illustrates the answer for us in clear terms.

God sent Jonah to warn the city of Nineveh that in forty days the city would be destroyed because of its wickedness. Jonah was fearful of going and fled. He was swallowed by a great fish

and called a second time. On the second call he went and preached the warning God has commissioned. Notice that God did not change the message that Nineveh needed to hear.

The message of warning was believed by the people, even the king. They put on sackcloth and ashes, which indicated their deep sorrow for their sins and their fear of impending doom. They cried mightily unto God for salvation, turning from their evil ways. They repented. They changed their minds about their evil lives. They turned from their transgressions.

God saw their works of faith. He saw the results of their repentance. He saw that they determined to do differently. It was then that God repented, changed His mind, about their destruction. They were spared. But when did He change His mind? It was when man changed his mind about his transgressions against the will of God.

What Changes?

God has decreed the eternal death of the wicked. But God will change His mind, not about His decree, but about those individuals who will turn from their wickedness. To make the application very personal, God changes His mind about our being in heaven or hell, depending upon what we do. We have a choice. We have the power to change God's mind toward us. We can leave the service of Satan and enter the service of God. Unless we do that very thing there is no hope for our souls in eternity.

God alone knows the genuineness of one's repentance. Repentance is a matter of the heart, and God knows the hearts of everyone. We can see the fruit of repentance in people's lives, but that follows genuine repentance. Repentance is a matter between a person and God; one that involves the spiritual and inward man, the soul of man.

Down through the years God's messengers have called on people to turn from their evil. How the prophets of old sounded forth the message of God for the Israelites to return to God and leave their idols and sins. John the Baptist urged the people to repent. During His personal ministry Jesus preached repentance. Faithful gospel preachers have always included in their message God's command for everyone to repent.

We urge one and all to let our faith lead us to repent and let repentance lead us to further obedience in confessing Christ and obeying Him in baptism, and in life following faithfully the Lord,

walking in the light as He is in the light.

† † † † †

Why Did Christ Die On The Cross?

Nearly two thousand years ago Jesus was born of the virgin Mary in a stable in Bethlehem. As an infant He was taken into Egypt to escape being killed by Herod. Later, after that immediate danger had passed due to Herod's death, He was taken by Mary and Joseph to live in Nazareth where He grew to manhood. At the age of twelve they took Him to Jerusalem. The events that transpired there made it evident that Jesus was fully aware of His identity and His mission in this world. "*Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*" was His reply when questioned by Mary and Joseph as to why He went not with them when they left Jerusalem to return to Nazareth (Luke 2:49).

About the age of thirty Jesus embarked upon what proved to be approximately three and one half years of His personal ministry on earth. He began by preaching the message that was preached by John the Baptists, "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye and believe the gospel.*" (Mark 1:15). During these years He busied Himself teaching, preaching, selecting His apostles, performing miracles of compassion and confirmation of His words, doing good, showing Himself to be the One of whom the prophets had spoken, the Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior of mankind from sin and the giver of life.

In spite of the holiness of His life, He was betrayed by one of His own, seized by His enemies, subjected to a series of mock trials both civil and religious, persecuted, humiliated, tormented and eventually crucified on the cross at Calvary.

Not The End

The story of Christ does not end, however, with His body in

the tomb. After three days, by the power of Deity, He came forth in His resurrection, the ultimate proof of His Deity (Romans 1:4), soon to ascend back into heaven where He was coronated as King of kings and Lord of lords, to await that time when, according to God's infinite wisdom, He shall return to take His own into heaven where they will live with God in righteousness and eternal glory without end.

Our study centers on the death of Christ on the cross and asks, "Why did Jesus die on the cross?" It is evident that Jesus is the focal point on God's plan for redeeming man. He is the centermost figure of all history. Everything before Him pointed to His coming and everything that follows points back to Him. Even those who do not accept Him to be who He is must recognize the importance of Him because even the dating of our time considers His birth. Our years are dated according to A.D. (the year of our Lord). Of course, Christ is also the center of our worship and it is through Him that we have approach to the Father in heaven.

We know more about the death of Jesus Christ than any other one person of ancient history. The inspired Scriptures provide us the answer to our question regarding the reason for His death.

"Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures; and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve, after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as one born out of due time." (First Corinthians 15:1-8).

Fundamentals

Listed in the above passage are the basic and fundamental facts of the gospel of Christ. The gospel consists of facts to be believed, commands to be obeyed, and promises and blessings to be enjoyed. The first fact mentioned to be believed of the gospel is that Jesus Christ died.

The death of Christ is noted by both baptism and the Lord's Supper. We are buried with the Lord in baptism, dying to sin, to be raised to walk in a newness of life as He was raised from the dead (Romans 6:3,4). In baptism we obey the form of this doctrine (Romans 6:16-18). Baptism, along with other purposes, is a picture, an emblem, a presentation of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The observance of the Lord's Supper is a memorial to Christ that gives emphasis to His body and blood that were sacrificed on the cross (First Corinthians 11:26).

There are those who would discount the death of Christ by declaring that He was but a mere martyr for a lost cause, or only an example of suffering, or the victim of a self-imposed and self-designed plot that backfired, or even the recipient of justice as a rebel, blasphemer and criminal who was executed for His crimes. None of these things are true and none of them harmonize with the facts as they are revealed to us in the only reliable records of events known to mankind.

But was the death of Christ absolutely necessary? If His death was to save man, could not God have saved mankind some other way without having Jesus to die on the cross? There is no doubt that God could have provided for man's salvation any number of ways if He had chosen to do so. But the fact remains that He chose the way of Christ on the cross. Whatever other way God might have devised and delivered, men could have asked the same question, "Could not He have done it differently?" It is not ours to question God's wisdom. We are not always able to probe the depths of the mind of God except to the limit He has revealed it.

Demonstrates Love

As we consider the way He has offered salvation, by the sacrifice of Jesus, could God have demonstrated more conclusively and decisively His love toward mankind than the way He has done? Jesus once said, *"Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."* (John 15:13). But Jesus, being Deity, even went a step beyond that. He gave His life for those who were His enemies, those who were yet in their sins (Romans 5:6-9).

Divine Wisdom

The first reason we offer as to why Jesus died on the cross is that it was according to His love and then add it was according to God's infinite and all-knowing wisdom. *"For the Jews require a sign and the Greeks seek after wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men."* (First Corinthians 1:22-25). While many consider God's wisdom as foolishness, so are we impressed with what Isaiah has written in Isaiah 55:9, *"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts."* We are not capable of grasping fully the mind of God and must accept on the basis of the authority of His word that what He considered necessary is the way it ought to be. We show ourselves arrogant to challenge the wisdom of God. Our own finiteness ought to cause us to hesitate to dispute the wisdom of the Infinite One.

Complete The Plan

There is another reason Jesus died on the cross that we can readily understand. Christ died on the cross to fulfill the program and scheme designed, developed and gradually unfolded through the years and dispensations prior to Christ. Even in Genesis, shortly after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden because of sin, God hinted of the defeat of Satan by One who would be of the seed of woman (Genesis 3:15. God later promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that through them One would come through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3; 22:18). In Galatians 3:16 Paul identifies that "seed" as Christ.

Moses said, *"The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken."* (Deuteronomy 18:15). In Acts 3:22, Peter said that Prophet was Christ. In the Old Testament we find many types, shadows, pre-pictures, events and objects that represented the coming Christ, such as the Passover lamb, the fiery serpent, the various sacrifices under the law of Moses. If Christ had not died on the cross as promised, predicted, prophesied, all the great revelations of God prior to Christ would have been for naught, would have proved to be

meaningless, indeed, even a misrepresentation of things. But by His death, He proved and demonstrated that God is not slack concerning His promises and His word (Second Peter 3:9). He fulfilled the law by accomplishing its purposes (Matthew 5:17,18). The things which happened to Jesus are summarized in Matthew 26:56, *"But all this is come to pass that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled."*

Prove His Identity

Another reason Jesus had to die on the cross was to confirm the truthfulness of His Messiahship and His identity as the Son of God. It is said of Jesus, *"From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day."* (Matthew 16:21). Again, *"Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into this world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice."* (John 18:37). In John 2:19-21 Jesus foretold His death and resurrection. *"Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body."*

Had not Jesus died He would have proved Himself a fraud. The Messiah was to die and arise again. Christ had to confirm His claim as Messiah, and He could not have done so unless He did die on the cross as He and others before Him foretold. If He had not done as He said, for what reason could we have any confidence in anything He taught?

He Died For Us

First Corinthians 15:3 teaches the last reason of our lesson. He died for our sins. He died on our behalf, the just for the unjust, the righteous for the wicked, the innocent for the guilty. His death was a vicarious suffering. He had done no wrong, yet He accomplished for us what we could never accomplish for ourselves. *"But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ."* (Ephesians 2:13). *"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that*

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners..." (First Timothy 1:15). *"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have a Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."* (First John 2:1,2). The word "propitiation" means atonement, the way God has provided for there to be established peace and reconciliation between man and God. Someone has suggested that "atonement" can be broken into parts and the meaning is better understood. It is "at-one-ment." He brought about the means of man being in a state of oneness with God by providing for the forgiveness of that which alienates man from God; namely, man's sins.

Our Peace

By His death on the cross we can have peace with God (Ephesians 2:16). Paul pleads for men to be reconciled to God (Second Corinthians 5:20), and the means of reconciliation has been provided by Deity, and that means is Christ and His death. We are justified by His blood (Romans 5:9).

The death of Christ was not just another case of martyrdom, nor merely an example of suffering. He surely was not a criminal dying for His own misdeeds. Nor was there any sinister plot to make Himself appear to be what He was not. His death was the sacrifice of the life of the Son of God as satisfaction to God for the sins of mankind. He paid the debt that man could not himself pay. As Jesus said, when facing the hour of His death, *"But for this cause came I unto this hour."* (John 12:27). That we might be saved from sin is why Jesus died on the cross.

† † † † †

It is planned that the next two issues of this booklet, **A Burning Fire**, will consist largely of six or seven lessons on a series entitled **WHAT IS LIBERALISM?**

I am confident everyone will find the studies challenging and certainly many will be in complete agreement and others may be openly hostile to what they read.

At The Feet Of A Traitor

A traitor is one who is guilty of betrayal, a deceiver, one who breaks and violates a trust and confidence. The very word "traitor" carries a connotation of something evil, sinister and despicable, that which should be shunned because a traitor is shameful but often shameless.

From whom do we learn the lessons we need to learn in order to follow the Lord as He would have us do? Of course, we look to Christ, the inspired apostles, the other godly characters of both the Old and New Testaments. From these we learn what we ought to be. But we can also learn from others what we ought to avoid and never be. We can profit by their mistakes (First Corinthians 10:11). Let us sit at the feet of a traitor and learn something that will enlighten us. May we attentively listen and observe. Judas the famous, more properly called infamous, of all traitors, can be the source of many lessons. He betrayed Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We now read the account of his evil deed.

Three Texts

"Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him." (Matthew 26:14-16).

"And while he yet spake, lo, Judas, one of the twelve, came, and with him a great multitude with swords and staves, from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he that betrayed him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss that same is he: hold him fast. And forthwith he came to Jesus and said, Hail, Master, and kissed him. And Jesus said unto him, Friend, wherefore art thou come? Then came they, and laid hands on Jesus, and took him." (Matthew 26:47-50).

"When the morning came, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. And when they had bound him, they led him away, and led him to Pontius Pilate the governor. Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests

and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.” (Matthew 27:1-5).

Worse Than He Thought

First, we learn that sin is worse than people think it is. Too many take sin lightly. Sin can and does condemn the soul to torment. Sin is what separates a person from God. It is called spiritual death. It is a terrible thing for one to be stamped, CONDEMNED. Every sin is hideous and destructive.

When David sinned the magnitude of it was far greater than he realized. The same is true of the sin of Adam, Cain, Moses, the prodigal son, and our own sin as well. We may not experience immediate and external consequences of sin and therefore may be inclined to consider it lightly. Because God does not punish sin as rapidly toward us as He did with Ananias and Saphirra we ought not think sin is a minor matter. Sin is not just against our fellowman, ourselves, but against God.

Probably Judas did not realize how far-reaching his betrayal of Jesus would be. He may have surmised that Jesus might be persecuted and even beaten, but eventually released. Here was a way to get some “easy money,” so he followed through with his plot against the Lord. We do not know this was his thinking, however. He seems to have been shocked that Jesus was treated so cruelly and condemned to death. His dreadful deed was worse than he thought it would be or he would not have taken such actions as he did.

Wages

From Judas we learn that the results of sin cannot be escaped. In the Old Testament when some of the tribes of Israel promised to help in the deliverance of the land of Canaan until all was taken if Moses would allow them to settle on the eastern side of Jordan, Moses warned them that they had to be sure to keep their word and not forsake their brethren, and he added that if they did go back on their word, *“Be sure your sins will find you out.”* (Numbers 32:23). Judas learned this lesson the hard way.

It is evident that after a while Judas was smitten with remorse because of his evil deed against Christ. But why? Nobody pointed an accusing finger at him. Those who had conspired

with him did not rebuke him. He did not hear Jesus or the other apostles raise charges against him. What caused him such deep sorrow for his deed? He was driven to despair and finally to suicide over it. We can discover the reason.

Four Courts

There are four courts, so to speak, before which each one must stand regarding his actions in life. There are the civil courts before which the person who violates the law of the land must stand. There is the court of public opinion that places great pressure on a person from the society around him to conform. There is the court of one's own conscience that reminds him of his evil deeds even when nobody else condemns him. There is the court of God before Whom we all shall stand and be judged according to divine law.

It was Judas' knowledge of his own evil in comparison with his knowledge of God's divine law that would not let him go free. When nothing else condemned him he still condemned himself. He could not live with the knowledge of his own guilt. It plagued him. He could not escape.

There is a story of a man who graduated from law school, opened his office and began his practice. But after a few years he closed his office and tore up his diploma because he could not live with the knowledge that he had received it under false pretenses because he had cheated to pass the examination. Even though nobody else knew what he had done, he knew it, and could not escape the results of his sin.

Wrong Cover

Judas also made the mistake of attempting to cover his sins the wrong way. He brought back the money, admitted his error, but that did not make matters right. Deeds once done are done forever. Words once spoken cannot be retrieved. How many times we all might wish we could live moments and situations over again so we could do better than we did the first time. But one cannot cover his sins by trying to make up for them. To be sure, one should try to correct his misdeeds. But there is only one way to cover sins, and that is to receive forgiveness of them. That can only come from God. One must ask God, God's way, for forgiveness. Judas returned the money, even hanged himself, but this could not pay for what he had done. Doing

good, or imposing self-punishment is not a “spot remover.” Doing good is something we all should be doing. But we can never do enough good to cover even one sin. Only by forgiveness from our heavenly Father can we ever really be free from the guilt of sin. Once He has forgiven, we are free.

Eternal Effects

Let us learn something about hope and relief. There are earthly and immediate consequences that sin sometimes brings. But there are eternal consequences also if sin is not forgiven. There may be sins we commit and we cannot and shall not escape the physical, temporal and earthly consequences of our wrongdoing, but we can still escape the eternal consequences of them. Let this illustration help us.

Suppose a man gets drunk, which is sin, and drives his car, has a wreck, injures himself or some other. He can be forgiven his drunkenness if he comes to God, God's way. But he will still suffer the physical results of his sin, possibly the remainder of his life. The blood of Christ can wash away his guilt, but his battered and bruised body may never heal as a result of his transgression.

Sometimes people go their own way to their own detriment and bring upon themselves all manner of hardship, then turn to God for their forgiveness, as they should, but expect all the havoc and misery they have created to suddenly vanish away regardless of the nature of their sins. This is unrealistic and not what the Lord promised.

Judas could have been forgiven of his betrayal of Christ if he had returned to the Lord in penitence. But he did not. He suffered not only his guilt to his death, and shall stand before God as the betrayer of God's Son, but consider the mental agony and torment he suffered as well because of his sins.

We may never be able to fully overcome the results of our sins here on earth. But there is hope for us if we truly repent and obey God's commands by which we can be forgiven of our guilt.

As we sit as the feet of Judas and learn about sin from him as one who committed such gross travesty against Deity, we see that sin is worse than we might at first consider it to be. Unless forgiven, it will bring an eternal doom.

You really will not escape all of the results of sin. We have no power to cover our sins by ourselves. No amount of good that we might do thereafter provides for the forgiveness we need.

While we may live the rest of our days in regret and suffering because of our sins, we do not have to remain covered with guilt because the Lord has provided us deliverance from the spiritual death sin imposes.

Sin Removed

How can the guilt of sin be removed? We do not look to Judas to teach us anything here because he did not seek removal of his sins the right way. We must look to Christ because He came to forgive sinners and save them from sin (First Timothy 1:15).

We must realize our guilt and say, as did David, "*I have sinned.*" We must put our faith, trust and confidence in the One God sent into the world, Jesus Christ (John 8:24). We must repent of our sins (Luke 13:3). We must confess our faith in Christ (Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10). Then we must be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27), and then the Lord will add us to the church (Acts 2:47), which is composed of the saved (Ephesians 5:23).

The result will be that our soul will be washed clean by the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9) which we have reached in baptism (Romans 6:3,4), and our sin removed. In the knowledge that sin is removed, even with the earthly consequences that may well remain, we can take heart and courage and live righteous lives to the glory of God.

Let us not make similar blunders as did Judas. Learn from him and avoid his mistakes. There is a better path to follow than the one he tragically decided to trod.

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YOU CAN HELP!!

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Affordable Ignorance?

The Holy Spirit has placed tremendous emphasis on knowing the Word of God and translating that knowledge into obedience to God. The high cost of ignorance is really more than anyone can afford, if they would only consider it. Isaiah 1:1, *"The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his masters crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."*

The ox and ass are among the least intelligent animals. Yet, the ox knew who owned him and ass knew from whence his sustenance came. Isaiah rebuked Israel because they were not only ignorant of God and failed to recognize a the source of their blessings and provisions, but what made matter worse, they were unwilling to be otherwise. They thought ignorance was something they could afford. Were they different from many among us

"Doth not consider" means they were not concerned enough to even inquire. They were just too busy with anything and everything else to take the time and put forth the effort to come to a knowledge of what they desperately needed to know. Were the Israelites the last people to take this same attitude toward gaining knowledge of God's will?

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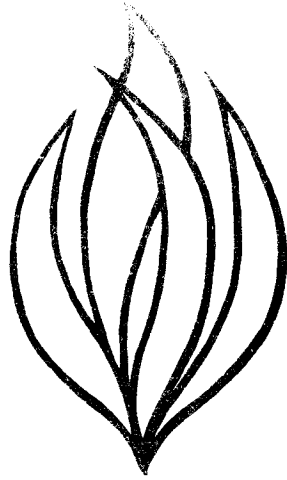
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).

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What Is Liberalism?

Lesson One

There is a system of thought in our world called Liberalism. It is not something new in the world but has existed in varying degrees since the beginning of man. But it is being promoted with increasing fervor today and with considerable success, being adopted by many, even many who are not aware of what they are accepting. Liberalism is being felt in almost every area of life, economically, politically, socially, morally, educationally, in child-rearing, as well as in religion.

We are concerned about liberalism in these studies as applied to the moral and spiritual realm. Such is our business as children of God. We would insist, however, that there is an inseparable tie with liberalism religiously and liberalism in other realms because they exhibit common goals, stand on a common premise. But we are concerned with liberalism in other realms than religion only indirectly. But so often being liberal in one area indicates a liberal spirit in other areas.

Why should we be so concerned about it? First, it affects our lives. It affects the church. Any ideology that dominates so much of what is happening in the world deserves study. The sheer magnitude of its influence demands we acquaint ourselves with it. To follow blindly anything without proper consideration of evidence and facts is folly. One has written, "To say the Lord's people are facing liberalism and that it will soon be our next battle is false. It is not merely facing us. It is upon us. We are now in the midst of a great conflict. It is now time for men of God to rise up against this modern nonsense."

Great Danger

This writer is convinced that the attitude and action of liberalism poses the greatest immediate danger facing the church, though not the only danger. The church has faced problems since Pentecost. There seems to be no escape from them. In our time the church has faced the threats of apostasy

by human legalism, known as antism, where some contend to bind what the Lord has not bound, making laws God has not made. But such a problem pales into relative insignificance when compared to liberalism. Human legalism has divided, confused retarded and muzzled much of the work of the church. But liberalism, if pursued and tolerated, will destroy the church from among us and our children. The church has not always fared well in the battle against it.

Our plan of study is to define our term of liberalism so we can recognize it. We are confident some brethren would not recognize a liberal or liberalism if it had a sign painted across its forehead. We want to note the basic tenets of liberalism in its world-wide quest for dominance in the religious world generally and contrast it with the Bible. We shall consider the many evidences and drifts of liberalism in the church today. Finally, we want to learn what can and must be done to fight against it and not be overcome by it.

Definition

What do we mean by liberalism? A definition of terms is essential. Liberalism is a system of thought, a philosophy, an attitude that manifests itself in actions, doctrines and words that affect the lives and spiritual welfare of all. Regarding the Bible it is primarily negative because it denies the Bible to be God's authority. It denies there is an outside authority over man and contends that man is his own authority, his own last court of appeal, his own judge, jury and lawmaker. "Man is the most. It contends there is no supreme and infallible authority such as God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Bible. "To each his own as he sees best" is its rule. "Do your own thing" is its motto. Liberalism religiously is the freedom of the mind to satisfy its own spiritual needs its own way, as defined by the World Book Dictionary. Liberalism is the overturn and repudiation as well as the disregard of authority. This is at its tap root.

Liberalism contends that truth is relative, not absolute, and liberals are absolutely sure about that. There is no final right or wrong, no requirements to which one must conform because "we are free." Truth is either non-existent or so evasive that one cannot really know what truth is. It may be the object of constant search but one never really finds it. Looking for truth is like seeking a black cat in a dark room that is not in the room anyway. They contend that since honest and intellectual people

have differed, none can claim to be right. Just how they find a standard by which to determine who is honest and intellectual, seeing they deny all standards, is not explained.

Liberalism says one can know only what they personally experience. Knowledge is existential and truth to you is only what you have experienced. This is one reason liberals do so many strange things because they are seeking to broaden their experiences regardless of the way or the area where they have an experience. It serves as the basis for the emotional craze in our world, with people taking dope to “get high” and experience something new. Since experiences vary, truth must vary and cannot be solid. They say, “If you haven’t tried it, don’t knock it. You can know only what you experience.”

Its Opposite

Liberalism can be understood by considering its opposite which is Conservatism. Conservatism is the disposition to preserve. It generally opposes change. Liberalism contends nothing remains stable and everything must change, even truth.

As liberalism relates to the church, if pursued, it will cause the church to lose its identity, its distinction, abandon its allegiance to the Bible as authority, and drift with the customs, tides and currents of the day. There are those who seek to change the church and restructure it because they are convinced everything must change. They work to break down authority, remove limitations and boundaries, repeal laws, dismiss commands and directives from the Word of God, and alienate the oncoming generation from the older one in order to establish their new ways without the opposition that the older generation would offer. The existence of rules, laws, regulations and oughtness is contrary to a liberty they profess.

Liberalism is “this world” centered. It is sometimes identified as Humanism. It is the parent of the “social gospel” which has concern only for the here and now, the matters of this world, the environment and physical body, exclusive of God and the spiritual realm. It is unconcerned about life after this one, eternity, sin, heaven, hell, man’s spirit or his relationship to God. They plead, “If it feels good, do it. I’m OK, you’re OK, everything is beautiful in its own way. Do your own thing.” Such a philosophy, when believed and followed, has a tremendous impact on a person’s manner of life. We shall consider the ramifications of it in practical matters later in this series.

You may note that until now, while defining liberalism, there have been no Scripture citations. This is because you do not turn to Scripture to define liberalism. Scripture presents the very opposite of a liberalistic spirit. We contend that liberalism is the most destructive philosophy that now exists among human beings, especially with respect to his relationship to God.

Conflict

It takes no great effort to see how liberalism conflicts with the Bible. The Bible teaches there is a divine authority over man. Space prohibits quoting and commenting on the many verses found in the Bible on this matter. But the student may wish to consult some of the following passages. Jeremiah 10:23; Proverbs 14:12; Matthew 4:4; Ecclesiastes 12:13; Matthew 28:18; Second Timothy 3:16,17; John 12:48; Acts 17:31; First Corinthians 11:3; Second John 9; Second Corinthians 5:10, and many others could be listed.

The Bible teaches that truth is absolute and can be known. See John 14:6; 8:32; First Timothy 2:4; John 16:13; First John 2:21; Proverbs 23:23; Ephesians 1:18; 3:4; 5:17; First Peter 1:22, and others. There is one Savior, one church. There is evil and good, right and wrong, sin and righteousness.

The observant person will realize that on this point the philosophy of liberalism contradicts itself. If there is no absolute truth, how can liberals be so absolutely sure that is true? If we cannot really know truth, how can they claim to know that truth cannot be known? Any system that "shoots itself in the foot" as does liberalism does not deserve being accepted.

The Bible teaches that truth does not change. Hebrews 13:8, First Peter 1:25; Jude 3; Galatians 1:6-9; John 12:48; First Corinthians 11:26. Therefore, the liberalistic idea that religious truth varies violates the Word of God. Customs, habits, human institutions, traditions, etc. may change, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. But truth does not change. Is it not strange that some "Christians" hasten to adopt the customs in style, dress and manners that reflect an imitation of a godless world more than that which imitates the godly? Does it not make one suspect that his allegiance is in the wrong things? Truth must override customs and similar matters.

The Bible places emphasis on both this world and the next. This life is a preparatory period for that which is to come (Matthew 24:44). There is another life, a resurrection from the

dead, an eternity either in heaven or hell, the destiny being determined by how this life is spent before God (Second Corinthians 5:10; John 5:28,29). God's people look for a better country (Hebrews 11:16). Our affections are centered elsewhere (Colossians 3:2; First John 2:15; Luke 12:15,20; First Timothy 6:7; Matthew 6:19). The prime concern of Jesus is salvation of man from sin (First Timothy 1:15).

Liberalism and the Bible are miles apart on nearly every score. The Bible is God's authority. Liberalism is anti-authority.

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Lesson Two

We now turn our attention to that part of liberalism that is called modernism. We must understand our terms, even if we do not always use the same terms. I am using these terms to mean that all modernism is liberalism, but not all liberalism is modernism. Modernism is a prominent religious concept held by many theologians, clergymen, denominations, Romanists, Protestants and Jews. It is not modern, but is as old as the disobedience of Adam. It stems from man's desire and determination to be "free" to do as he chooses without being held responsible for his deeds before any authority, such as God. Such a concept obviously cuts the heart out of Christianity.

Modernism denies that the Bible is the Word of God, but is only a human product, produced naturally, through the use of documents that none have ever found, but modernists contend must have existed. Second Timothy 3:16,17 and Second Peter 1:20,21 both affirm the divine inspiration of Scripture, but modernism denies it.

Anti-Bible

In denying the Bible it naturally denies what the Bible teaches regarding such things as the account of creation. Modernism subscribes to evolution, atheistic and/or theistic, neither of which is compatible with Scripture. Not all evolutionists are

atheists, nor are all modernists atheists. But they all deny the Biblical account of creation.

Modernism denies the reality of the miracles as recorded in Scripture. They attempt to explain every record by some naturalistic process, and when they cannot do that they outright deny it happened, such as the flood at the time of Noah, the story of Jonah and the fish, the miraculous healings, the virgin birth of Christ, etc.

Modernism denies the Deity of Christ, contending He was just a man and nothing more than an exceptional one. Prophecy and its fulfillment is likewise denied. This denial, however, makes both the writers of the Old and New Testaments deliberately liars for one spoke prophecy and another spoke of its fulfillment. Modernists have to deny prophecy and its fulfillment because this involves the miraculous which they deny even as they approach the Bible before they investigate it.

The return of Christ and the judgment, life after this, both are denied. Their conclusions makes this life without purpose or meaning for man's existence, born only to die and nothing more.

The necessity of salvation and the church being composed of the saved is denied because they deny the reality of sin or the need of spiritual salvation. To modernists the church is a decadent social order that deserves extermination or a complete restructuring to make it "relevant" to the times. The only salvation modernists ever mention is salvation from earthly ills.

Radical Liberalism

All in all, modernism denies all such things that would make for a final and supreme authority, totally discarding the Bible and all that is revealed therein. Modernism is a very radical form of liberalism. Some deplore the use of labels and identifications as liberal, conservative, modernist, etc., but without such labels there would be no way to mark those who teach so contrary to Scripture. Labels are needed in order to expose and oppose such error and assist us in learning to avoid such things and preventing being overcome. Christians ought not cringe from the use of labels since Paul told us to "mark" certain ones (Romans 16:17). If we are intent on preserving the faith of the Bible we will not shy away from being called conservative in that matter. We are not ashamed to be called fundamentalists, a term often

reserved for extreme positions but a term that can also be applied to those who contend for the fundamentals of the faith. Nor shall we be shy to label a liberal a liberal and a liberal doctrine as a liberal doctrine. Most clergymen and the ruling powers in most religious bodies today are liberals; many being outright modernists. The rank modernist is very prominent in most denominations, but thus far is not often the case in the church. But there have been cases of rank modernism among brethren from time to time. To be a modernist means one cannot be a faithful Christian and a church that is modernistic in its positions cannot be the church of Christ. It may still retain the identification as a church of Christ, but there be a number of churches that call themselves a church of Christ which is not a church of Christ.

Another Liberalism

The problem in the church is liberalism of another sort rather than the blatant, arrogant, denials of modernism. It is a mistake to refrain from branding as liberal those who are liberal just because they might not be modernists. Liberalism, even though not modernism, is a disregard for the authority, and the necessity for authority, of God's Word. There be those who do not deny the denials of modernism who are liberals just the same. Their liberalism cultivates the ground for the planting and growth of modernism. Liberals usually do not look with great disdain toward modernism, but are inclined to be "tolerant." It is liberalism of this insipid nature that can cause the church to lose its distinctiveness as quickly as any other way. To follow liberalism means to soon be undeserving of the identification of being the church of Christ. We now turn our attention to various forms of liberalism as is evidenced among many among us.

We need to be aware of liberalism and that it is being taught and promoted, being accepted and adopted. We can only know of it by being informed. As a gospel preacher, it is my duty to point out the manners of liberalism among us lest others be subverted. We must see the distinction clearly between liberalism and God's truth. We cannot afford to entertain liberalism in any congregation or look upon it lightly in any congregation that calls itself the church of Christ.

Some Examples

I am sure there are many examples of liberalism that I shall not mention. Those that I do mention are those with which I have had personal contact, having heard, read, personally or from tapes, seen in articles, heard in conversations, encountered in correspondence or exposed to it in some way personally. I am not guessing or supposing that the things I shall mention exist. I know they do and know it first hand.

It is liberalism to contend that the church of Christ is a denomination among denominations. It is liberalism to say one church is as good as another. One said, "We may as well admit we are a denomination." I forcefully deny the Lord's church is a denomination. If a church is a denomination it is not the Lord's church, and if it is the Lord's church it is not a denomination. The New Testament knows nothing about denominations existing by the authority of God. Rather we read of condemnation of the division it propagates and upon which it feeds. The church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22,23); composed of the saved (Acts 2:47); and there is but one (Ephesians 4:4); built by Christ (Matthew 16:18); purchased by His blood (Acts 20:28); is His possession (Romans 16:16); He is the head of it (Colossians 1:18); and He will deliver it as God's kingdom to the Father (First Corinthians 15:24); because He is its Savior (Ephesians 5:23). The church does not teach or practice denominationalism, nor even claims but rather denies any fellowship or kinship with denominationalism. Only liberals lie about the church to call it a denomination among others.

Akin to the above, it is liberalism to say "Christ saves, but not the church," because it leaves a false impression that the church is not essential to salvation. This is denominational language, not as the oracles of God. Some are heard to advise, "Preach Christ and not the church." Certainly Christ saves, but those who are saved compose the church. One cannot preach the Savior without the saved; the King without His kingdom; or the head apart from the body. The attempts to separate Christ from the church, or the church from salvation, is to preach false doctrine of liberalism. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth (First Timothy 3:15). One must be a member of the church to be saved because salvation is in Christ (Second Timothy 2:10), and to be in Christ is to be in His body and His body is the church. Why should anyone who professes to love the Word of God wish to make statements that detract from His church which He bought with His own blood? Attempts to discount the church, make the church of little to no importance

in salvation is to remove oneself from under the authority of God, and this is what liberalism does.

A Liberal's Phrase

Along this same line, liberals talk about "church of Christ doctrine." There is no such thing. The doctrine is the doctrine of Christ, not of the church. The church is to uphold His doctrine, not make, alter, rearrange or tamper with it. Denominations have their doctrines in their creeds, manuals, prayer books, catechisms, etc., but the Lord's church has the responsibility to preach the doctrine of Christ. The church is not to make doctrine but preach and practice His doctrine. To speak of "church of Christ doctrine" is to reveal Biblical ignorance. Some do not wish to accept the doctrine of Christ so they cast off His doctrine by calling it "church of Christ doctrine."

Liberalism extols the denominations while speaking disparagingly of the church. I have heard liberals say, "We are fifty years behind the denominations." So what? That is even too close to that which the Lord planted not and shall be rooted up. Some think the denominations do everything better than faithful brethren. But they fail to realize we are not doing the same work. The church does God's work, God's way. Denominations do not even teach people correctly how to be saved.

Very Negative

Liberals like to point out what they consider to be wrong with the church in its work and the way it stands for the truth. Why should God's people want to be like those who are merely religious but not God's people as denominations? We do not want to be behind the denominations. We do not even want to be on the same road. We cannot afford to go the same direction. We must ever be as far "behind" them as necessary to continue to be the Lord's church. We ought to love the body of Christ more than to place it beneath the human religions and cast reflections against it and its sacred design and marks of identification. We might remember that the methods used by denominations to promote their error are not necessarily the methods God's people ought to use to promote the truth.

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Lesson Three

It is liberalism to promote, endorse, and enforce the use and acceptance of the modern versions of the Bible as if they were reliable translations. This included such versions as the Revised Standard Version, New International Version, Today's English Version, New English Bible, and many of the private translations like Moffatt's, Goodspeed's, and similar publications. One of the worst is called The Living Bible.

We are aware that no translators were inspired of God. Nor are we unmindful that there be weaknesses and faults in any of them because translations involve the work of human beings. However, the weaknesses and faults are not of the same type and seriousness.

Anti-KJV

Some have jumped on the modern speech version bandwagon to the extent that they now make all manner of charges and criticisms against the King James Version, thinking if they can find fault with it that this in some way gives credibility to the new things. We have no objections to new versions per se. We have no objections to translations that use synonymous terms and teach alike. But we are disgusted with so-called translations that are nothing better than paraphrases and human commentaries, mistranslations, and rewritten passages that do not teach what God revealed but rather incorporate into the text the doctrines of men. We have never understood why those who say they love the truth are so insistent that brethren adopt one of these new perversions that teach fatal doctrinal error. Their passion for the new has led them from what is true.

Some have gone so far in their advocacy of the new versions to declare that elders have no right to determine which version or versions may be taught publicly from pulpits and classes. They would rob the eldership of their God-given authority and supervision in order to force new versions upon those who attend. Such is the manner of liberals. Many churches now have such things as the New International Version in their auditoriums, distribute them to people, especially the young, and evidently do not know, or what is more likely, do not care

what these books teach.

The schools operated by brethren have done more to promote the modern versions than probably any other one source, even some of them doing it while they were denying doing it at the same time. Such books are tools of the devil that cannot but lead to digression because they teach things foreign to the Word of God. New books mean new authority. New authority will produce a different people. The adoption of them shows a gross disrespect for the Word of God and reflects a contemptible attitude toward the inspired Word.

Most of the new versions have been produced for monetary gain and the promotion of denominational dogma. But some of my "let's be with it" brethren and the "scholars" keep cadence with the liberals and modernists that have produced them.

Liberalism denies that a translation can be inspired. No one after whom I have heard and read contends the translators were inspired like the original penmen. The scribes of the Old Testament were not inspired but what they copied was. Jesus quoted from the Septuagint translation and contended it was inspired, a translation of seventy Hebrew scholars. Do you suppose Jesus knew what He was doing? To the extent a translation is just that, a translation, it is as true as the original text. This is true or we cannot have and do not have the Word of God in our tongue.

First Peter 1:25 would insist that God has given His protection over the preservation of His Word. To deny any translation can be inspired is to contend that the Bible may only contain inspired thoughts, which is the contention of many who say the Bible is only man's commentary on the Word of God. One of the most ridiculous statements we have ever read and heard about modern versions was that when one reads the RSV, NIV, KJV, and ASV, he is reading the very words of God. How can this be when these books do not say the same thing. I mean they not only use different words, they teach different doctrines and where some add, others take away. But the legs of the liberal are never the same length. Scripture contends for a total, verbal, plenary inspiration of an inerrant, infallible, all-sufficient and authoritative Bible. The King James Version is the nearest and best that is available to the English reader, even with its sometimes found archaic words, obsolete formations, and syntax and translational weaknesses. We commend it, preach from it, and people can understand it and know the truth they must know to be saved. This is not what can be said of such

versions as the NIV, RSV, etc.

Regarding The Holy Spirit

It is a mark of liberalism to teach the personal, literal indwelling of the Holy Spirit, giving direct influence, guidance, direction and divine help. Some say the Holy Spirit actually, literally, takes up residence in the body that houses our spirit.

While Scripture teaches that the Spirit dwells in us and we in Him, it also teaches that God the Father dwells in us as does the Son (Romans 8:11; First Corinthians 3:16; First John 4:12; Ephesians 3:17). To teach that we are led by the Spirit by some nudges, notions, feelings, and special guidances is to negate the all-sufficiency of the Word of God. The Word dwells in us also (Colossians 3:16). The truth is that to the extent man abides in the teaching of the Word, to that extent he has fellowship with Deity. The "indwelling" is but a Biblical way of speaking of our fellowship with Deity. We do not become "little gods" with Deity inhabiting our bodies.

This literal, personal indwelling idea is sometimes cited from Acts 2:38 and the "*gift of the Holy Spirit*." There are several views on what that means, but the most consistent one is taught right in the text itself. While some contend it is a personal indwelling, others teach it is the possession of miraculous powers.

Peter was answering the question, "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" He told them to repent and be baptized, all of them, in the name of or by the authority of Christ, and told them why. It was for the remission of sins. What would be the additional result of their obedience. They would receive something. What? A gift! What gift? A gift of the Holy Spirit, meaning from Him, given by Him, His gift. This is a possessive phrase, like the doctrine of Christ shows to whom the doctrine belongs, the gift of the Holy Spirit shows the One who gives the gift. It is the Holy Spirit's gift, not the Holy Spirit Himself. We also read of the gift of God. That is not God Himself (Acts 8:20; Ephesians 2:8; Romans 8:15). The gift of Christ (Ephesians 4:7) is not the literal indwelling of Christ Himself. Verse 39 of Acts 2 tells us what the gift of the Holy Spirit is.

Gift Of The Holy Spirit

It is the giving of that which was promised. It was a promise

that was extended to *“you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.”* The verse begins with the word *“for,”* translated from the Greek word *“gar,”* which means there is to follow an explanation of what has just been stated. Peter explains the gift of the Holy Spirit as a promise given as extensively as even to us. That is not the promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, nor the promise of miraculous powers, nor the promise of personal inhabitancy. I know of only one promise in the Bible that is as inclusive as what Peter stated and that is the promise to Abraham that in his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. That referred to Christ (Galatians 3;16). Salvation would be offered to man through Christ. Those who believed and obeyed Christ would be given that great salvation. The gift of the Holy Spirit is reception of the promise of salvation that God offered to the entire human family through Christ, the seed of Abraham. It is not a literal, personal indwelling. That idea has given rise to much of the Pentecostal doctrines of direct leading, direct operation, direct guidance. It gives rise to religion by “feelings” and claims of tongue speaking, miracles today, and some even claim that this “indwelling serves as a protection against sinning in a supernatural fashion.” It brings on this “being more spiritual” attitude because Deity lives inside. We have heard it claimed that prayer is answered because of the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Some confuse God’s providential answers to prayer as being a result of a personal indwelling. This is a part of the vast array of false doctrines and positions that find their origin in the contention of a personal, literal, actual indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It just is false as can be.

Holy Spirit And Scripture

There is not one influence upon man that Scripture attributes to the Holy Spirit that is not also said of the Word of God. Just what all Deity may do for us, we are not in a position to tell. But what Deity does TO us, in leading, guiding, directing, comes by and through the all-sufficient Word. The Holy Spirit operates on the hearts of people, but the instrument He uses is the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). The Spirit and the Word are not the same, but the Spirit uses the Word, To contend for a direct operation by the Holy Spirit, separate and apart from the Word, is to jump off into the disregard of Biblical authority, which is liberalism.

Some contend for a personal indwelling of the Spirit but do not contend that the Spirit does anything special as a result. They say they could not even know the Spirit dwells in them except the Word says so. This may be a relatively harmless view as far as distorting the work of the Spirit and man's relationship to God. It does not detract from the Word as the other views mentioned. But it has no Biblical support and is a misinterpretation of what the dwelling of Deity in man, and man in Deity, really means. It means we are among the saved and we have fellowship with Deity because of that relationship.

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Lesson Four

Those who promote liberalism like to say that man cannot say who will be lost. "Leave the destiny of people to God," they say. To say who shall be lost is to "judge" and we cannot "play God" like that. This is so deceptive and misleading. If the liberal is consistent with his words he cannot say what is sinful, wrong or a violation of God's law. Sin is a transgression of law, God's law (First John 3:4). All sin (Romans 3:23). Sin separates man from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Why am I wrong to say that those who do such things that violate God's law are in sin and are lost? Has not God already decreed it so? Are we in error to teach people what God has said?

Judges Judge

If we cannot "judge" anybody, who does the liberal judge those with whom he differs, even on this point? Does he not violate his own rule, even as mistaken as his rule is? What reason is there to reprove and rebuke, as Paul commanded, unless it is to condemn that which is wrong and warn that those who do wrong sin and are lost? We do not violate the teaching regarding judging to teach what God has already judged and condemned. To fail to do this would be to judge God, saying that God is wrong and has no right to say what is wrong. We are not in the "line drawing business" but we are in the business of

pointing out the lines God has already drawn. When God says certain things are sinful, and those who do them are lost, God is the One who has judged, not man. Man is simply teaching God's will. If ever a person is guilty of "playing God" is when he says we cannot teach what God says.

It is not a manifestation of hatred of others to condemn evil. It is a manifestation of hatred of error. But this is what we are supposed to do. "*Abhor that which is evil.*" God hates the false way. Why should not those of us who love and follow His will?

Some have become so tolerant of sin and so "loving" that they outlove God. While it is true that we are forbidden to judge another's heart and motives, for we have not that ability. We can test fruit that is borne. We are to warn of sin. We are to condemn sin. We are to tell our fellowman that sin will mean hell unless it is forgiven. To do otherwise would be to discount, disregard and dismiss the authority of God, which is liberalism. "*Judge righteous judgment*" is a direction of Christ (John 7:24). How inconsistent is that liberal who tells you that you are condemned when you condemn! Some are so afraid of hurting the feelings of others they run roughshod over the will of Christ. We tell you that those who are not Christians, faithfully serving Him, cannot be saved in that state. Will the liberal challenge that? If so, by what authority?

Sacrifices Truth

It is liberalism to offer to give up truth for the sake of unity. I once read a question a "preacher" asked. He said, "What are you willing to sacrifice for unity's sake?" He added that truth should not be given up but only matters of opinion. With this we all can agree. But then he proceeded to name a few things he would give up, such as calling the church the church of Christ, opposition to the use of instruments of music in worship, matters of faith and revelation, and not mere matters of human opinion as he suggested.

When asked why give up calling the church the church of Christ, he told me that everybody claims to be the church of Christ. So what? Everybody may claim to be George Washington but that does not mean they are. Everybody may claim to be millionaires but it takes more than the claim. When asked if it is Scriptural to refer to the church as the church of Christ he said it was, but still he would give it up if it would bring unity with others. With whom could it bring unity? It would only

accommodate those who wear names not found in Scripture and who show no respect for speaking as the oracles of God. Shall **we** seek unity with such as those at the price of revealed **truth**? There obviously exists an element in the church that **must** think unity is the ultimate goal in everything. That is not **so**. We can be united and be far removed from being pleasing to God. Unity in error characterizes many religious people. Only unity based on truth is the unity the Lord wants. To compromise and give up truth just to “get along” with somebody is to sacrifice God’s will for human fellowship. We are not at liberty to do that. The “dialogues” into which some have involved themselves are not really unity efforts but efforts to have fellowship with each other in spite of divisions. Those that want unity can have it when they all follow the truth. To seek unity but disregard authority is liberalism.

Answering Prayer

The liberal often confuses the question of whether God answers a sinner’s prayer by confusing the difference between an alien sinner and a Christian who sins. When asked, “Does God answer a sinner’s prayer?” one “scholar” said, “I hope so for we all sin.” This is an example of the duplicity of teaching characteristic of liberals.

We doubt not that Christians sin (First John 1:8,10). But children of God have the privilege of prayer and the promise of being heard and the assurance of God’s answer that those who are not in Christ do not have. God is not the spiritual Father of those not in Christ. The alien is not His spiritual child. He does not sustain the same relationship with God as the Christian, even the one who sins.

That God is aware of all things, even all prayers, we do not doubt. He took note of the prayer of Cornelius (Acts 10). If that is what is meant by “hearing and answering prayers” we could agree. But the one out of Christ has no line of communication with God as yet. He is an alien and lost, severed from God by sin. To give an answer to the question such as the liberal cited above one would think there was no difference between the Christian and the alien. It is simply to thrust a false idea that God answers the prayers of sinners. Those that contend otherwise need to show it so by Biblical authority and not be evasive and use deceitful cliches.

Music

Liberals teach it is acceptable to have choruses, solos, as well as congregational singing. Recently we read where some even now contend there is no authority for congregational singing. They say this to try to make way for the use of the instrument, admitting there is no authority for it. Even if they are right, and they are not, they would have only proved we do two things unauthorized rather than proving instruments or choirs right. But the New Testament teaching does authorize congregation singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16) but not so with solos and choirs. All are commanded to sing and in the singing we teach and admonish one another. When the choir or soloists sing, who is being taught and admonished by the hearers? How can it be said they are doing what singing is to accomplish?

Never think that liberals will not reach out for some kind of "reason" to justify what they want to do, regardless of how foolish their "reasoning" is. One contended for choirs on the basis that when the congregation sings not everyone sings anyway. He also said that having a choir is no different from singing songs where one part sings for a moment, possibly a line or phrase, and other parts remain momentarily quiet awaiting the part applicable to them. This man teaches in one of the colleges operated by our brethren. Can you imagine what the young who sit in his classes must get from him?

Anybody who cannot see the difference between some singing and others never singing, as in choir presentations, and songs where each one sings his or her part just does not want to see. Nobody is forbidden to sing when different parts are sung. That is not true when only the choir is to perform. The fact that some do not sing, which is error on their part, does not justify incorporating that error into common and acceptable practice. Liberals will say most anything to find excuse to do what they have already decided they want and will do the authority of God notwithstanding.

One of our "scholars" in a Bible department, and at a lectureship, said people from the Christian Church should be accepted in full fellowship without rejecting the instrument of music, without acknowledging it is wrong to use it, if they promise not to cause any trouble over it. He said, "Try to teach them, but if they just cannot see it, it is better to accept them anyway." Can you believe this?

Can you see Paul teaching in Ephesus to accept brethren who

still served Diana if they promised not to cause trouble over it? Do you really think sin can be overlooked "if you just can't see it?" How many other things of the will of God can we push aside if people "just can't see it?" This is liberalism that has blossomed and gone to seed.

Supposed To Come Out

Those who have heard, believed, and obeyed the gospel are added to the Lord's church. But you never read of anybody doing these things to become a member of a denomination. When those in the church preach and practice error they are to come out from it, repent of it, cease to practice it, not just promise not to make trouble over it. They cannot hold to false views just because "they can't see it." Do we take the same attitude toward other sins as lying, stealing, adultery, ignoring the Lord's Supper, etc.? I suppose many do, but it is the wrong approach toward correcting false ways. When you realize that many young people and congregations are hearing this sort of thing and going along with it, is it any wonder that those who know and love the truth contend that liberalism is a hideous danger to the church?

In the next lesson we shall discuss dancing, social drinking, immodest dress, profanity, and other forms of worldliness. We shall discuss the flippant and irreverent terms used by some in prayer with reference to God, also theistic evolution, the contention that there is no specific and exclusive day to partake of the Lord's Supper. Many are the inroads of liberalism among brethren. Some care. Tragically, most do not seem to know the difference between right and wrong and many of those have no intention of learning because they don't care.

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Local Autonomy was never intended to serve as a shield and protection for false doctrine. We respect God's government that calls for each congregation to govern itself, but truth versus error is not confined within congregational boundaries. There is something missing in the minds of brethren who think they can teach and preach openly and publicly whatever they want and then claim immunity to exposure on the grounds of local autonomy. JB

Confession

One of the principal points in the doctrine of Christ is that of confession. This lesson is designed to teach what the New Testament teaches on this subject.

What is a confession? It is an act of confessing. It is to admit, acknowledge, avow, grant something to be true. It may be a confession of a condition, a fact, a crime, or some reality. But it is to settle the matter to say, "This is true and this is what I believe."

The New Testament teaches confession in at least two senses as it pertains to the faith authored by Christ. One is a confession or acknowledgement concerning Christ. The other is the confession or admission of sin.

Confessing Christ is essential to our salvation. "*Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God.*" (Luke 12:8,9). "*Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.*" (Matthew 10:32).

Who is to be confessed? It is Christ. What is it about Christ that we are to confess? We must confess that He is the Son of God. The whole system of Christ stands or falls on that point. When Jesus asked His disciples who they thought Him to be, Peter answered, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" (Matthew 16:16). Jesus explained that it was upon that rock, that confession, that truth, that He would build His church. Paul added, "*For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*" (First Corinthians 3:11).

Consequences

Take note of the consequences of confessing and the refusal to confess. One means being acknowledged by the Son of God before the Father. The other will result in being denied as belonging to the saved when we stand before the Father. Have you properly considered the value of making the confession concerning Christ? Paul wrote, "*That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the*

mouth confession is made unto salvation." (Romans 10:9,10).

We have an example of one confessing his faith in Christ in Acts 8:35-38. Philip had preached Jesus unto the Ethiopian. The Ethiopian asked, *"See, here is water. What doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."* Upon that confession Philip baptized him. Like faith and repentance, confession of Christ must proceed baptism.

While confession is essential to salvation, the Bible does not give us any specific manner in which this confession must be worded. There is no formal procedure to be followed. But the acknowledgement of Christ and the admission of one's conviction that He is the Son of God is a part of God's plan for saving man from sin.

Some Who Confessed

We read of others who confessed Christ. God confessed Him at His baptism and transfiguration (Matthew 3:7; 17:5). John the Baptist said of Him, *"Behold, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."* (John 1:29). Again, John 1:34, *"And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God."*

We have already noted the confession by Peter in Matthew 16:16. Martha confessed her faith in John 11:27, *"I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world."* John wrote, *"Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God."* (First John 4:15). There are several instances of the confession of Christ.

Even though this confession is essential, it is not all-sufficient. People can give "lip-service" to Christ (Matthew 15:8). Confession without obedience is like saying, "Lord, Lord," but failing to do the will of the Father as required in Matthew 7:21. To say we have fellowship with Him, but walk in the darkness of sin is to make ourselves liars (First John 1:6; 2:4). The way of salvation is not "confession only" any more than faith only or grace only or anything else only.

When we confess Christ we are admitting many things. We acknowledge Him as God's Son, His Deity, that He is Savior, He is authority and His gospel is truth. We admit that we are sinners and in need of His salvation. We concur with what the Scriptures reveal concerning Him, His miracles, His words, His life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, return and judgment.

When one truly believes that Jesus is the Son of God he will readily accept all that the Bible teaches concerning Him.

Not Only Once

In one sense our confession is not just a one time matter prior to baptism. In the manner of life that we live thereafter we acknowledge Christ and that He is our Lord and Savior. When we are tempted and resist temptation we are confessing Christ. When we are tried and hold fast to what is right we acknowledge Him. When pressured to do evil but remain loyal, again we show our faith in Him. When opportunity to do good is afforded us and we seize it and do what is good we are saying to all, I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Observing the Lord's Supper is a proclamation of Christ, an admission of our faith concerning Him and what He did on our behalf.

All would not confess Christ while He was on earth, even some who believed on Him (John 12:42). All will not confess Him now. John wrote, *"Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is anti-Christ, that denieth the Father and the Son."* (First John 2:2). *"For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is some in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an anti-Christ."* (Second John 7).

People often meet opposition to their confession. The blind man did (John 9). Parents, family, many others may well oppose your statement and life of allegiance to Christ. But, like the blind man who was healed, we must let nothing keep us from confessing Him.

There is a second confession of the religion of Christ that is a confession of one who has already become a Christian, but who sins again. That a Christian can sin, does sin, may even so sin as to be disinherited is plainly taught in Scripture. John wrote, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us... If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."* (First John 1:8,10). Christians are taught to confess their sins (James 5:16). This is one of the conditions of forgiveness. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* (First John 1:9). Christians, like the prodigal son of Luke 15, can say, *"I have sinned."* We need to confess to our heavenly Father our sins as the prodigal did to his father.

Error About Confessing

The teaching of confessing sins by Christians is not a doctrine of “bearing all to all”. There is nothing that authorizes the doctrine that we are to reveal to anyone, whosoever, wheresoever, whenever, every thought, deed, word, etc. of our lives. Rather than this action being the confession taught in the New Testament, it is rather a mind-controlling, intimidating, power-grabbing manipulation of those who would place themselves above others. Neither is there a “confessor father” to whom we make our confessions.

When we sin we must confess them to God because all sin is against God. When our sin involves others, to the extent it does involve others, to that extent that our sin is known and brings harm on the Lord’s body and His truth, to that extent it should be acknowledged. We need for others to forgive us of our sins when we have sinned against them. How can they forgive us of our sins if they are never aware of our penitent spirit concerning our sins? However, when one is neither knowledgeable nor involved regarding our sin, he is not privileged to receive confession of it. Too many times throughout religious history there have been those who have exercised a cultish control over others through the demands of confession. But Christ is our high priest and it is through Him that we approach God, not some man, or prayer partner, who sets himself up to pass judgment on our confession and exploit our souls.

It is well to add, however, that one cannot openly, publicly sin and then expect to “cover it all up” in a corner. This is unreasonable as sinning “in a corner” and trying to “cover it up” openly before all when all are not even aware or involved. If your sin involves others, include those it involves. If it is a matter between you and God, then settle it between you and God.

What Confession Is Not

This confession of Christians is not simply saying, “IF I have sinned.” That does not admit anything except possibly a willingness to repent. That attitude is good as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. We are not merely commanded to confess as willingness to repent. We are taught to confess our sins. Nor is it a confession that simply says, “I want to do better.” If that was what confession of sins is, then everybody ought to be making a public confession all the time, everytime, because who among us should not want to do better? Again, the confession the Bible teaches is a confession, admission of sins.

Upon that confession, we, as Christians, have the privilege of prayer to ask God's forgiveness. This is what Peter taught Simon in Acts 8:22.

If you are not in Christ you must confess Christ as a step in your response to the call of the gospel, prior to being baptized for the remission of sins. If you are a Christian and have so sinned as to call for a public confession, then do not delay to confess your sins before all. If you have sinned before God and He alone is aware of it, confess it to Him, and ask Him to forgive. This is a necessary step for the Christian to be forgiven.

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ARTICLE: Hard Preaching

Everyone probably has their definition of what "hard preaching" is. Preachers who are serious about the truth are finding the very task of preaching to be harder and harder because so many have lost real love for it.

It is not uncommon to hear somebody say about a visiting preacher, or someone of whom they have received report, "He sure does preach hard." Possibly you are acquainted with statements heard about a preacher conducting a gospel meeting, "Do you preach that hard at home?" as if there should be a conscious effort by the preacher to preach "hard" away from home but "softer" at home.

What is this thing called "hard preaching?" It might depend upon how applicable the sermon is to the life of the one doing the measuring. If the sermon called for something the hearer has already done, that is not too hard. If it condemned something of which the hearer is not guilty, that is not too hard. But if the lesson presented God's requirements in a matter that the hearer has not obeyed, or condemned some sin of which he is guilty, then that sermon might be labeled by him a "hard sermon" and the preacher a "hard preacher."

In our day there seems to be a lessening desire for certain sounds, sound speech, sound doctrine and clear distinction between truth and error. Some are repulsed by anything that shows the line God has drawn. They often insinuate that the preacher has drawn the line of his own authority rather than what he has actually done; namely, brought attention to the line

God has drawn. But such preaching is called "hard."

With some only the mushy, ambiguous, "yo" type of sermons (those kind where you can take it either way, yes or no, whatever you like) is judged to be preaching "in the Christian spirit." Even among many brethren this attitude of choosing what you like and discarding what you do not wish to accept, (the same attitude that has dominated the denominational world throughout history), is very much in evidence. A growing number just would prefer nothing that is demanding or that possibly could offend anyone. As one elder once told me of a sermon(?) he heard from a preacher(?), "It was wonderful. Nobody was upset and nobody felt guilty. Nobody was aroused and all left feeling good."

I challenge anybody, if they really "*preach the word*," to offend nobody. What can you preach? You will not preach Jesus Christ as the Son of God because that will be too hard for the unbeliever. You cannot teach that salvation is only in the church because non-members may become offended. You certainly cannot teach the moral standard of Christ because that would offend liars, the dishonest, the adulterers in multi-married relationships, drinkers, swearers, on and on. To them moral purity is hard preaching. Just sit down and try to figure it out and see if there is much of anything in the Bible that you can preach that somebody does not call "hard preaching." You will find you have no material left.

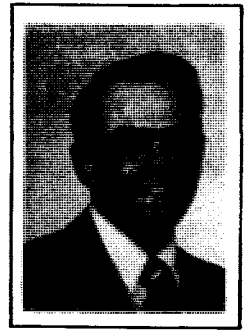
You really cannot even preach the truth on the lovely theme of love because so many have the distorted impression that love means acceptance regardless of what you do, that it is only an emotion that prevents objecting to any doctrine whether false or not, crossing anybody despite their conduct. Few subjects have been as maligned in our time as the subject of love. That love demands obedience is "hard preaching" to many people even though Jesus said we show our love by our obedience.

While there is no excuse or justification for deliberately abusive speech from the pulpit or anywhere else, we need to "get our heads on straight" before we cast stones at what some have called "hard preaching." It just could be that the truth is being preached just as the Word of God has revealed it and what is "hard" is the heart of the one who is hearing it, who does not really want it, and therefore will simply reject it, hoping to somehow cast some discredit against it by calling it "hard preaching."

JWB

What Is Liberalism?

It is significant that there is considerable discussion among faithful brethren about the philosophy called Liberalism. It is unfortunate that everyone who professes to be a Christian is not better informed about this sinister and deadly series of doctrines that are not only evident in the religious world generally but also are quite evident among many brethren, those who profess to be members of the church of Christ. Too few keep up with what goes on and are woefully uninformed and misinformed. But this can be changed.



JAMES W. BOYD

In this issue there are four lessons on the subject and these will be followed by three more on the same theme in the next issue. Also included will be other lessons on other subjects.

It is not intended that these lessons be an exhaustive study of liberalism in its many faces and forms, but hopefully will strengthen the faithful in their stand for truth and might arouse and awaken some who are content to sleep while the ways of error erode the very foundations upon which we stand.

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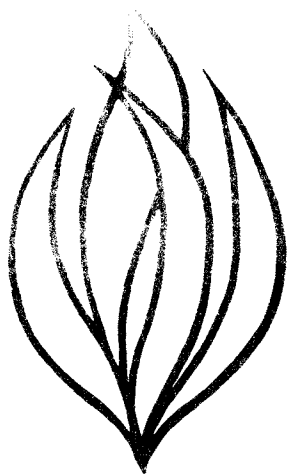
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).

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What Is Liberalism?

Lesson Five

Liberalism gives acceptance and approval, either by openly advocating or silently condoning, the worldly evils as the modern dance, smoking, drinking alcoholic beverages, including what is called social drinking, immodest attire, profanity and other such things. Modern dancing is one form of lasciviousness, a work of the flesh (Galatians 5:19). *"They which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."* I know that the liberal, worldly church member does not accept this. But that changes nothing except his likelihood of going to heaven. Even the originators of these dances and the godless who participate in them admit they are for the sexual enjoyment of them. Only now and again some irresponsible parent, or some person who seeks popularity, will try to argue to the contrary. I have seen church bulletins that commend young people for some social recognition they were awarded at the school prom. The preacher and elders of that liberal outfit did not represent the Lord's church but a distorted picture of what being a Christian involves. They are of the world but claim to be of Christ. If they had respect for the authority of God they would have disciplined the young person rather than praising him. But this permissiveness has infected many of the modern and liberal churches that still call themselves churches of Christ.

Social Drinking

First Peter 4:3 condemns what is called in the KJV, *"banqueting."* This literally means taking strong drink in small amounts. When I began preaching you could hardly find one who claimed to be a gospel preacher who would not oppose such a practice, or even silently condoned it. But now the insipid college-trained and liberal clerics will go along with their sinful church brethren and social drinking is no longer by many considered a sin. They have surrendered the will of God for the praise and pleasure of this world. Elderships that tolerate such as that are servants of the devil, leading their flocks to hell rather than heaven, and do not deserve being called Christians, let

alone elders.

In spite of First Timothy 2:9, "...that women adorn themselves in modest apparel," there is seldom a gathering of "Christians" where scanty clothing is not worn. Some churches even sponsor mixed swimming parties. Preachers even joke about it. Preachers, whose daughters have paraded themselves before the eyes of the world in skimpy clothing in beauty contests, are invited to speak at youth rallies. Honors are given to those who have won such events. Then we wonder why the church has no impact on the evil of the world! It is because so many in the church are no different from the world. There was once some brethren who refused to serve the Lord's Supper until the "ladies" of the church quit wearing their revealing mini-skirts to worship. What sacrilege! If gospel preachers preached the truth and opposed such things they were accused by liberals of being "dirty-minded." Such people may not know it but they make themselves fuel for hell. Women who have no more respect for themselves than to expose themselves as many do are not faithful followers of the will of God. Such exposure provokes lust and leads to overt immoralities. But what care the liberals? They have discarded serious regard for the Word anyway! They are keeping up with the fashions regardless of how offensive to God and faithful brethren.

Liberals like to create doubt about the day on which the Lord's Supper is to be served. We have heard some preachers participating in wedding ceremonies where the Lord's Supper was supposed to have been served. Others have said they see more reason to partake of it on Thursday, the day the Lord instituted it, than to do what a few disciples in Troas did. Such teaching shows contempt for the authority of the Bible, which is the characteristic of liberalism.

We have authority to partake of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week (Acts 20:7), in the assembly (First Corinthians 11), which we are not to forsake (Hebrews 10:25). Where is the authority for partaking of it any other day? Let the liberals produce it! They cannot and will not but this will probably not matter to them. They do what they want because they are liberal, having no regard for divine authority when it runs counter to what they want. Evidence proves nothing to them unless it suits what they want.

Evolution

The teaching of theistic evolution runs rampant among members of the churches of Christ in many places. It has been growing through the years. Beginning with Bible department heads of the schools who said it would be a mistake to withhold fellowship from those who adopt theistic evolution, to teachers in science and Bible departments that openly endorse the Satanic doctrine that contradicts "thus saith the Lord," it has spread into the churches. There are men in the church who go about conducting lectures to prove the existence of God who hold evolutionist views and positions, who make the arguments of theistic evolutionists, making the same false charges of theistic evolutionists, attacking the same Biblical revelation as do theistic evolutionists, and yet, deny they are theistic evolutionists. But when you deal very long with liberals you soon learn that lying is a common characteristic among them.

There is no compatibility between the organic theories and hypothesis of atheistic, agnostic or theistic evolution and the Word of God. Neither science nor the Bible sustains such a doctrine. But what care those who want to be considered "somewhat" among the "wise" of the world? They have no qualms about calling the Biblical account of creation a myth. They will embrace in fellowship those who deny its historicity. It has become the "in" thing among the unbelieving "scholars" to accept evolution. Liberals do not dare risk their acceptance in the world by standing for the truth of God!

Disrespect

With the upsurge of disrespect for the Word of God it was to be expected that this disrespect would soon be directed toward God Himself. Liberals have been heard to address the Almighty God as "Dad." "The man upstairs" is a phrase tossed about by them. They consider God about like most consider a good buddy. They have such contempt for the reverent terms of Thee, Thou and Thine, preferring You, and Yours, because the modern "versions" use such terms, and because they hold the KJV with such hatred. They have leaped beyond reason to where even one referred to God as "The Big One." We use these phrases with caution as we discuss them, only to express our total rejection of them, and cite them only to show what liberals have done and are doing.

God is not like the neighbor next door. He is the Eternal and

Almighty One, the Creator and Judge. He is our Heavenly Father. Deity is not to be considered with flippancy and cheap familiarity. There are those who even condone using You and Yours in their so-called Bibles regarding Jesus Christ even when such usage has been deliberately denoted to refer to mere man and thereby cast a shadow on the claim of Deity by Jesus Christ. Is there no limit of sacrilege and profanity of Deity to which the twisted, conceited and rebellious liberal mind will not go?

Coming Through Schools

While many in the church howl at the next point, there has not risen one to my knowledge that can refute it. The most prominent source of liberalism coming into the church is coming through the schools of "higher learning," graduate schools and colleges. It is not necessarily liberalism to seek and acquire high scholastic degrees. But it has become THE criteria for some to even consider somebody competent to preach the gospel. There is probably no more self-exalted people on earth than the religiously degreed professor. What he does not know is unimportant, and if you do not believe these people are that way just deal with them. There have been some who have reached high levels of academic learning who have remained loyal, faithful and strong. Some are the most outspoken against liberalism and stand for the truth. But many have bowed the knee to liberal Baal, have returned to fill chairs at colleges as professors, and infected the youth, elderships and church with the heresy they learned at the seminaries while attaining their academic degrees. Is it not evident that something has gone awry in schools where even their founders, and the most stalwart preachers of the gospel who taught there, are no longer considered deserving of consideration, no longer considered qualified to teach the young about the Bible, even aspiring young preachers? Has not something gone amiss when the works of faithful brethren are pushed aside and/or totally discarded if not ridiculed in favor of the outpouring from non-Christian, liberal, modernists and unbelieving "scholars"? But this has contaminated college after college.

Just consider the lists of men who are invited for lectureships. Does anybody making the selections care whether the persons are sound in the faith anymore? Are these people deserving of being placed on such programs simply because they preach for large, rich churches, so often churches that have led in one way

or another from the truth? Why do administrators of colleges feel disposed to furnish pulpits for those who have torn the church asunder by their false doctrines and practices? Does the gathering of influence, power and money to operate mean more to them than standing for truth? We are confident the answer has repeatedly proven to be, "Yes." Some of the most experienced, sound, faithful teachers of truth are not considered qualified to teach in these institutions, but let some young, inexperienced, fresh-from-the-denominational-seminary with a doctors degree step forward and he is considered the man of the hour. Such is the disposition of school after school and this is why I have been forced to the conclusion I cannot have confidence in the Bible departments of these colleges operated by members of the church. Administrators give every indication that the school must be that for which Christ died and the church is instituted to supply and provide funds but keep quiet about the false doctrines and practices among them.

One head of a Bible department told me personally, when the drift and change in his department was noted, that young people will not listen anymore to anyone except the doctors. I told him that was no so and it was a vicious put-down of many faithful young people and gospel preachers. I asked him if the average gospel preacher can only teach the young possibly through high school but after that the only ones qualified are the seminary trained professors, he said, "That's the way it is." I deny that forcefully and brand it as collegiate contempt for faithful preachers of the gospel and evidence of the snobbery too often found among professors in these schools!

Liberalism has become so imbedded in the schools, being taught by liberal teachers, that it has done eternal damage to this generation of members of the church. Unless and until the church cuts itself from being influenced by these schools, the church cannot and will not retain its distinctiveness as the church revealed in the New Testament. The possibility that the schools will ever return to the teaching of soundness is so remote.

An Alternative

Many brethren, seeing this tragedy in education, have begun operating training schools for preachers under the oversight of faithful elderships. Not all such schools have stayed loyal to the faith. But the hope for properly and Biblical trained preachers comes not from the four year colleges, but from sound churches

who train sound men.

I can hear some twisted and prejudiced soul now declaring, "Boyd is anti-school." That is foolish. Boyd is anti-error that pours from these schools. Why should you not also be concerned? Do the schools have some kind of special dispensation from God to exercise "academic freedom" to the contradiction of the Word? Just who these professors and administrators think themselves to be? Why do they not educate the young and quit trying to dominate, regulate, manipulate and intimidate churches and fill them with the heresy so often found among the professors and in their classrooms?

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Lesson Six

It is no more right to pervert the work of the church than it is to pervert the Word of God or worship. Liberalism has carried the church into areas of activity for which there is no authority nor connection with what the church is supposed to do. The work of the church can be placed into one of three categories: (1) evangelism, (2) benevolence, and (3) edification. There is no truth whatever to the statement that whatever the individual can do the church can also do in all matters. There are many areas where individual and corporate work might overlap, but there are also many areas that are exclusive. Can the church vote in political campaigns? Can the church run a hardware store? Can the church join the civic clubs? Can the individual do the work the corporate body together is to do? There are many secular, social, economic and other matters open to the individual Christian that does not pertain to the work of the church.

Just which category do you fit building gymnasiums, tracks for jogging, weight lifting rooms and exercise classes? Just which category goes the entertainment and recreational efforts? Where do you place the secular education, chemistry laboratories, basketball courts and dormitory rooms even for students who pay tuition? Did it ever occur to elderships and preachers that Colossians 3:17 is still in the Bible? There is no Biblical authority for these things being a part of the program of work and

financially undertaken by the church? Why are some so arrogant to defy the necessity for authority? Is it because they are determined to have their way regardless?

Ancient Headline

Cannot you see the headlines in an ancient publication where the Christians in Ephesus nipped the disciples of Diana 8 to 7 in the latest races at the amphitheater? Would not Paul be proud of them and send them commendations? Who really thinks this is that for which Christ died?

The “this world” approach to things that characterizes the “social gospel” which is modernistic heresy has an offspring budding in the things some churches have assumed they have the right to do. What a glorious way to attract the young! Play ball! Feed them hamburgers and “pop” and take them to Christ! It probably will not be long before there will be a group traveling about the country playing basketball for the church. Let me submit a good name for them now. Let’s call them “Dribblers For Jesus.” We already have gymnastics for Christ by people who even perform on programs that teach false Pentecostal doctrines. Just why do such people have place among us? What use do such people have for the guidelines of Scripture? They show no regard whatever for divine authority. That is liberalism.

But just look at the churches, growing in number, that have male and female ball teams enrolled in the church leagues, playing members of denominational groups, as if such groups were acceptable churches, and leaving the impression the Lord’s church is one among them. Why do some brethren have no more regard for the body of Christ than to think they can represent it by a ball team, and give the impression it is no more or less than another denomination among denominations? While all have good clean fun, and there is nothing wrong with having good, clean fun, that is not the work of the church and the church ought not be identified with such tripe and trivia. If you think otherwise, where is your authority? Without it, why are you not upholding liberalism?

Too Much Doctrine

Liberals wail that the church teaches too much “doctrine.” “Doctrines divide,” the denominations have told us. Now some of our own brethren are singing the same song, along with their

instruments. "It is the spirit that counts," some say. It is true that doctrine often divides. It divides those who obey from those who do not. The spirit does count. But attitude and spirit do not constitute the sum of Christianity. Who can contend that the right spirit dismisses the doctrine of teaching of Christ? Liberals!

Paul stressed sound doctrine (First Timothy 4:13; Second Timothy 4:2,3; Titus 2:1,8). John did also (Second John 9-11). Some only want those parts of the gospel that pleases them. They do not seem too concerned about what pleases God. They want love, brotherhood, everything "positive," avoiding all conflict with anybody at all costs. All of that is well and good up to a point and faithful brethren work for these things short of compromising truth. But that is not all of the religion of Christ. Doctrine, which is teaching, is not to be minimized nor belittled. How can anybody stress too much what the Lord taught and/or authorized to be taught in His name, or by His authority?

Without taking space to discuss the doctrine of premillennialism, let us simply observe that many battles over this heresy have been fought. That false doctrine challenges the prophecies of God in the Old and New Testaments, denies the work of Christ, degrades the church, contradicts the gospel, abuses the truth and does not belong among the faithful. Today there has arisen a new generation that has fed on the fallacies of false teachers and again it is an issue in the church in places where once it was recognized to be false. One "scholar" told me that it was a mute matter in the church. I asked him where he had been. Had he not been told of books written by brethren holding to such foolishness? Had he discussed religion lately with denominationalists? It is not mute in the church nor in the world. There are many who espouse it and teach it, especially in the television religious programs. Even though it is a doctrine that denies the Word, Christ, the apostles and the kingdom, its nature and goals being human speculation, it continues. Why? It is because those who proclaim it do not have respect for Biblical teaching.

Thus Saith Men

Listen to some of "our preachers" today and if it were not for the theologians whom they quote they would not have much to say at all. I have heard tapes, read articles, seen films, listened to nationwide programs where the speakers made point after point, but never documenting what they taught from Scripture

but always from some "doctor" or what some philosopher said, did or thought. Many times the big programs do not even dwell on Biblical themes except remotely. They are often more of a psychology discussion with the emptiness of human ideas. Some of the so-called preachers in the church evidently spend more time reading the works of men than they do Scripture. They cite men more than Scripture to sustain what they contend is true.

I suppose to be able to quote Barth, Tillich, Schaffer, Lewis, James and others shows a man to be well read. But in what is he well read? One preacher of great fame, and once a college department head, could hardly preach a lesson without numerous quotes from William James or some other of his favorite religionists. Are brethren ashamed of Scripture? Do they even study Scripture? Is it really true that false teachers provide better sermon material than faithful brethren, even better than the inspired men of God who wrote the Scriptures?

Do not misunderstand. The learning of other might at times prove very helpful in coming to a better understanding of things. How many of us have profited immeasurably from the learning of men like Foy E. Wallace, Jr., Alexander Campbell, H. Leo Boles, and space prohibits listing many, many others. But they were, after all, men. If there is truth to be preached, cite its source. That source should be some book, chapter and verse, not some man, regardless of how learned, sincere, studious, influential or whatever.

Who is not aware of the strenuous efforts being made among brethren today to uphold teaching regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage that accomodates the multi-married, multi-divorced society of today? One book I read even contends that God's marriage laws are determined by the current customs of the people. He even said we are under the same laws and permissions that existed in the time of Abraham, Jacob, Moses and others. When I got through reading his writings I wondered why Jesus said anything about marriage at all. When asked why Moses commanded a writing of divorcement, and if it was lawful to put away one's wife for every cause, Jesus should have just said, "I have nothing to add. Everything that has been going on is fine with me. You may continue that way if you please."

The subject of marriage, divorce and remarriage is too lengthy for this lesson. But liberalism is having a hey-day among brethren on this matter. The authority of God has been subverted by the permissiveness and the attitude that anything

goes, Jesus' teaching is a covenant passage, if the teaching is too strong for anyone they can ignore it. How defiant many have become toward God's will on this subject!

There remains no question that the Bible teaches that God's will is one man, one woman, for one lifetime, and only one cause for divorce, with the guilty part not having the right of remarriage. After all the attempts to provide for those who have disregarded God's will in marriage, and all who have relatives and friends who have suffered divorces, God's will remains as it has been from the creation and only liberal thought will challenge it. Heretical teaching does not repeal it.

Fellowship Of Error

Liberals wish to have fellowship with all believers. There are some who are more restrictive and contend they only wish to have fellowship with all baptized believers. They talk about something never suggested in Scripture called "Big F" and "little f" fellowship. They propagate the false doctrine of "unity in diversity," when they really do not want unity but fellowship in spite of differences. They generally confuse fellowship and brotherhood. They have the idea that if one is my brother, having obeyed the gospel, that we shall always be in fellowship. That is not so. Brethren can, and at times must, withhold fellowship from certain ones.

Listen to liberals and watch their lectures and services. They will "brother" this false teacher and "brother" that false teacher. They make little if any distinction between brothers, unless of course you happen to believe you should not fellowship false teachers. Then you are an abomination before them.

Preachers are exchanging and/or willing to exchange pulpits with false teachers of the denominations as if all is well. One college trained "preacher" told me he would happily exchange pulpits with denominational clergymen because he did not consider them to be false teachers. He thought it would be a good gesture. He would even have to study on the matter whether he would consider Billy Graham a false teacher. Brethren are already having false teachers through films. They evidently do not care who they have if it will get a crowd. One church, knowingly, presented to their young people a "preacher" who advocates unity in diversity, believes the instrument of music in worship is not a sin, endorses members of the church belonging to lodges like the Masonic Lodge,

contended denominational preachers were not false teachers, and admitted he had never preached a sermon to the congregation against dancing. What a person to present before anybody, let alone the young! Who could ever accuse those elders of caring for souls according to truth? They could never be charged with standing for the right! Square that behavior, if you can, with Second John 9-11 and Ephesians 5:11?

With some, so long as one says he believes Jesus is the Son of God the doors of fellowship are extended and opened to him. Even devils will confess this. We must remember that there are those who are bending every effort and expense to turn the church into just another denomination. They think they will get along with people far better that way.

Ashdodic

Listen to liberals preach and their speech will betray them. They mouth the "language of Ashdod" (Nehemiah 13:23,24). They have cultivated a vocabulary that is overrun with digressive and denominational phrases. They obviously have not much use for Peter's admonition to " *speak as the oracles of God.*" Sound doctrine and sound speech (Titus 2:1,8) is something with which they are either not familiar or hold in contempt. They know how to do it better.

They will call preachers pastors. The Lord's Supper has been named as a sacrament. Auditoriums are called sanctuaries. They urge people to "witness for Christ." When the Bible talks about witnessing it speaks of those who were eye witnesses or who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Who among them fits either category? But denominations speak that way. So do they.

They urge "rededications" rather than restoration (Galatians 6:1). They get responses by the score when they invite everyone who wants to do better to come forward. Who should not want to do better? They have confused spirituality with the stains of spiritualism. They teach people to "go and tell others what Christ means to you." That is not what we are supposed to do. What Christ means to you may not be what He means to another. We are told to go and tell what Christ means as presented in Scripture. Then, to those who believe and obey, He will mean the same thing.

The list of digressive and liberal departures could be extended but these will be sufficient. Our next lesson will be devoted to what can, should and must be done in face of this barage of

liberal heresy that has captivated most of the religious world, and even subverted many, many churches and individuals who once could be considered faithful brethren in the Lord.

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Lesson Seven

Having shown in previous lessons the philosophy of liberalism, its claims and denials, and having discussed a number of matters that have arisen in the church pertaining to disrespect for the authority of the Bible, we now turn our attention to what can, should and must be done about liberalism in the church. Those matters we used to illustrate the liberalistic spirit among many are not all that could be listed, but were chosen because they are matters with which I have been personally involved in combating through the years I have been preaching the gospel.

It Is Here

First, we must realize that liberalism does exist. I am persuaded that too many brethren have their “heads in the sand,” either pretending all is well, or content to remain ignorant of the realities about them hoping it all will somehow just go away. There is no profit in denying what is so obvious. We have not reached the state of total despair or believe liberalism has become dominant among many. But liberals have done well in their wicked cause and liberalism is eroding the gains that have been made on behalf of the truth over the years, subverting souls, taking the church more and more into digression and apostasy. Even though bitter attacks are often leveled against those who warn of liberalism, even vicious attacks by some who cry for “love,” (deliver us from the kind of love liberals demonstrate), let us be honest with reality and admit we have the problem and we have it now.

Know What It Is

Second, let us realize what liberalism is for what it is. It is heresy. If you do not like labels, such as liberal, conservative,

anti, modernist, which do define and describe positions, then use the Biblical word heresy. That is what liberalism is. Heresy simply means standing opposed to authority. That defines liberalism and is at its core.

Its Sources

Third, let us recognize the sources from which it flows. This includes papers, publishing houses that sell anything and everything if it will make a profit, the colleges and especially the Bible departments, some science departments, modern versions, and the sophisticated, self-exalting, egotistical clergymen among us who are not deserving of being called gospel preachers. The sideshow artists and promotionalists who create attractions for great crowds, who attack everything, trying to remove whatever has been, who denounce even the people and their works on whose shoulders they have stood and in churches built by sound teaching, these are the major sources through which this heresy pours. We need to know who these are.

Show The Difference

Fourth, let us not only be negative and defensive regarding liberalism. Let us go on the attack by teaching the truth on all points in the doctrine of Christ. Brethren who are taught truth will be able to recognize liberalism. This series of lessons is one attempt to accomplish that very thing. We must show the difference between right and wrong, truth and error, so everyone will be able to discern good from evil.

We should not continue to use those men whose influence is toward liberalism. We should remove all literature that smacks of it. We should give warning to churches, preachers, elderships and whosoever that flirts with liberalism. False teachers do not deserve to be permitted in the pulpits and classes of faithful churches. We can keep the perverted Bibles out of the worship services and teaching sessions and never leave an impression in any way that would imply we accept them as reliable Bibles. We must discipline those who persist in holding and propagating liberal positions. We cannot obey God if we do otherwise. Some years ago I wrote an article entitled, "Why Should They Be Among Us?" It was an article dealing with how to handle false liberal teachers that arise in our ranks. Why should they still be in our ranks? Why should brethren allow them to continue as if

they were faithful preachers and teachers? God has provided a manner by which to dispose of those who are determined to teach error. Why do we not follow God's way? This attitude of "go along to get along" is the attitude with which Satan is pleased because it only produces apostasy. If we wish to get along with God we cannot expect to get along with those who defy and disobey God by defying His authority as do liberals.

Know The Book

Fifth, know your Bible. The surest preventive against subversion from either the left or right is a thorough knowledge of the truth. No smooth tongued orator, no personable preacher, no backslapping promoter, no college president, no professor of digression can take the church into error when and if the membership is Biblically informed. The taught will recognize error at the first sound of it and will not tolerate its continued proclamation nor support any effort where it is tolerated and promoted. But when brethren do not know what the Bible teaches, and do not keep up with what is happening around them, they can and will be tossed to and fro and taken any direction by the false teachers who are schooled and trained in moving the masses into liberalism.

This same knowledge will prevent you from going to the other extreme of human legalism where some bind what God has not bound. It will demand of everyone the necessity for authority for whatever is said, done, preached or practiced.

Prayer

Sixth, let us pray fervently, regularly and sincerely that in God's providence His Word and the church will prevail against those who would set it aside for whatever be their reasons so the oncoming generations will hear and be able to know and obey God's truth. Others fought valiantly that we might have the church and we should never be content to do anything less for those that follow us. God can overrule the false teachers and their false doctrines. We can allow Him to use us in doing that very thing. We are in a struggle for the continued existence of faithful churches. Liberalism will destroy us if we do not wage our righteous warfare against it. We need God's providential assistance and we have the avenue of prayer open to us.

Stand Up And Speak Out

Seventh, stand by the preaching of truth and the exposure of error. There be more than a few brethren who will not openly teach what is false. What they teach is the truth as far as they teach. But they will not teach the whole counsel of God and will not attack the devil's deceits, keeping their mouths closed rather than risking themselves. Not only will such people refrain from saying what needs to be said, even from pulpits, they often have disparaging words and belittling attitudes toward those who love the truth and the souls of people enough to stand up and speak out on the side of the Lord. Such people will, of course, be held accountable for their cowardice and neglect because they actually give aid and comfort to the enemies of truth. Do not allow yourself to be numbered among those who fear to be counted on the Lord's side even if it is unpopular with others.

Insist that the leadership and the church where you attend do what the Bible authorizes without addition or subtraction in its work and worship. Be a supporter of those things that are right and let it be known you are antagonistic toward that which is not according to what is revealed. When we love the brotherhood as we ought we shall not be content to be a silent observer during this crucial battle for the church, the truth, the souls of our children. The attitude of "staying above it all" is disgusting. If we cannot be a Moses, or Aaron, or Joshua, we can at least be a Hur, holding up the hands of those who are in the front lines fighting the battle for truth. Let it never be said of us that those who defend the faith have to fight a rearguard action because of us and our unwillingness to be involved.

On The Offensive

Eighth, always realize that the best defense is an effective offense. We can carry the battle into the holds of the enemy. We can challenge his heresies and expose them. We can so operate a Biblically authorized church in a positive and aggressively productive fashion that those who would speak evil of the truth we proclaim will be ashamed because that which we are doing is right and is being done effectively and Biblically. When a local church will do what the Bible authorizes with zeal and fervor there cannot be much the liberal forces can say or do that will retard it. We can, as Paul admonished, overcome evil with good. We have a good work to do, and let's do it!

Of The Devil

Liberalism is the doctrine of Satan. It serves the cause of Satan. It captures souls for Satan. Shall we sit passively and allow Satan to use this vicious philosophical weapon against precious souls and say and do nothing? The faithful in Christ will rise up as good soldiers of Christ, as many are already doing and the number needs to grow, and will enter the fray wholeheartedly, being assured that ultimate victory belongs to those who belong to the Lord and faithfully serve Him until death takes them from this life.

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Matthew's Call To Service

Matthew 9:9, "*And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of customs: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.*" This is the record of Matthew's call to service. He is also named Levi (Luke 5:27).

Immediately prior to this call Jesus had healed a man who had palsy. He also had forgiven the man of his sins. The Pharisees criticized Jesus for what He had done, but the multitude feared God and gave Him glory.

Matthew was a publican, which means he was a tax collector for the Roman government. He was a Jew in the service of the despised occupational forces. Publicans were classified alongside sinners. Any association with a publican was considered disgraceful. Publicans were considered traitors. When Jesus had any communication with them. He was immediately declared unfit. Yet, He called into His service just such a person. Matthew arose and followed Him.

Even though it is not explicitly stated, very likely there had been some previous acquaintance or knowledge of Jesus by Matthew. It would seem very odd that anyone would abandon his pursuits in life and follow a total stranger without having any knowledge whatever about him. The success of Jesus was according to the willing acceptance of people of Him. Therefore,

it is fair to assume that there had been a contact between them prior to this call.

A Man

Verse nine says, "*He saw a man.*" Matthew probably looked like other men in his appearance. His dress would not necessarily be distinctive. He could be lost in a crowd like anyone else. When Jesus saw him, however, He saw something more than just another man on the street going about his work.

Our Lord, being Deity, had powers of insight that surpass others. Being God, He could know even the hearts of people. He could see the real person as well as the outward appearance. Jesus obviously detected something about him, something in him, that others might never have suspected. Jesus could see not only what was before His physical eyes, but the possibilities in Matthew. He could see the potential. There was power for good if it could be channeled and directed. We would insist that there is much potential for good in each of us and we need to recognize that. We need to allow the power that we have be directed and guided by the Word of God. With every person there is more than meets the eye.

Dissatisfied

Jesus saw a man that evidently was not completely satisfied with what he was doing and with what he was getting out of life. How can we know this? The fact that Matthew readily left all that he was doing and followed Jesus shows us that he was not secure in his task. He did not find the collection of taxes for Rome to be the ultimate purpose and goal in life. He was not fulfilling the noble and spiritual needs that each person has. He may have been making much money. He might have had friends and looked upon by them with esteem. But if all that had been satisfying to him he would not have forsaken them. As we have already suspected, his previous knowledge of what Jesus offered loomed high above his present activity.

There are so many people today who are living their lives with a great measure of malcontentment because what they are doing in their lives and with their lives is not the kind of thing that satisfies the souls of people. Many are searching for something and often following after anything in the hope of discovering what is meaningful and truly beneficial in life. They would give

so much to find what is needed.

Jesus knows what we need. Jesus knew He could provide for Matthew what Matthew desired and needed. He could bring to him the contentment and usefulness in life for which he was created. Jesus can do that for all of us, if we would but follow Him. So many times our problems in life result from the fact that we have yet to establish and determine the proper priorities in life and therefore seek after many things that fail to satisfy and produce what really is needful.

Better

Jesus saw a man, but also a man who was really better than that which his surroundings would indicate. We cannot always be absolutely certain about a person just because of where we find him, or even the company that he keeps. It is true that evil companions corrupt good morals, and a man is known (to a great extent) by the company he keeps. We remember the old adage that says, "Birds of a feather will gather together." We would not void the validity of that notion. But at the same time we must realize that people have found themselves, even placed themselves, in situations and circumstances that do not reflect their genuine worth and character. They are out of place.

To emphasize this more, what if we had seen Jesus only when He was in the company of the publicans and sinners! Would we have rightly concluded concerning Him? He was in their midst, not for the purpose of participating in their evil nor appearing to condone their sins, but to save them. But who can deny that Jesus was far better than His immediate environment indicated at those times? The same thing was true regarding Matthew and Jesus saw that.

As a publican Matthew had a reputation that most of his fellowmen would have despised. But one's reputation is not always the same as one's true character.

It is true that our environment has a tremendous effect on our lives. We are not given to the doctrine that we are not accountable for our actions because things around us are unfavorable. That is a false doctrine. But we are aware that what goes on around us does have influence on us. This is the reason we should be careful where we go, with whom we associate, and the nature of the situations where we place ourselves. There are people and places that we do best not to be among them. It is not always easy for a person to overcome the forces of his

environment.

But there have been times when small things have triggered responses in people who were better than their conditions indicated and things which have motivated them to come out of those conditions. Some years ago there was a story circulating about a young lad in Cleveland, Ohio who had broken into a house to steal. But on the wall was a motto that read, *"In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy paths."* This is a quotation from Proverbs 3:6. This lad had heard his mother read him that phrase when he was younger. He turned from his evil intent and fled the house, never again to involve himself in such a thing as he was doing. Who could doubt that the lad was actually a better person than his immediate situation indicated?

We would like to think that this is the case with many of us. What we need is what Jesus offered to Matthew; namely, an opportunity to show he was more worthy than the way he appeared.

Needed Encouragement

Jesus, seeing a man, also saw a man in need of encouragement to be better. Because of his occupation many shunned Matthew, even despised him. This was a customary reaction toward publicans. We wonder if any ever spoke a kind word to him. Did any ever express concern for his welfare? Did any even offer a constructive word of rebuke? Matthew was not a hard-hearted person who would not listen. He should, could and would be responsive to the proper approach. It took Jesus to show the proper interest in him to bring him out from where he was into the service he could perform.

Matthew did not seek out Jesus as some others had done. The initiative was entirely with the Lord in this case. He sought Matthew because He was interested in Matthew. We must have this attitude toward others. People are not knocking at the doors of church buildings seeking salvation. They may be there wanting some material handout for the moment, but not much more. Few ever call the preacher and ask to be taught concerning Christ. They may call hoping he can "work a miracle" and solve some problem they have neglected and allowed to reach an almost unsolvable state. But seldom do they call because they are wanting to be saved. We must, like Christ, show an interest in them and seek them out. Possibly the reason so few are being saved reflects the unconcern of Christians for

the salvation of others.

He Would Act

Jesus also saw a man who would let his light shine when given the opportunity. Luke tells us how Matthew, named Levi, prepared a great supper for Jesus and invited his former associates to that supper. He wanted them to know what he had come to know. Christ was criticized for attending this feast, but Matthew was not ashamed of Jesus, nor was Jesus ashamed of Matthew.

There was a man who was converted to Christ who had lived a very wicked life prior to his conversion. He wondered how he might fortify himself against the criticisms and derisions that would likely come from his former acquaintances. This is an obstacle many have to face, even from families. The best weapon is to simply fortify yourself, declare yourself, firmly, confidently, kindly, and even while they may differ or denounce you, they will have respect for the fact you have made the decision. The only way to take a stand is to take a stand and let whatever consequences come be as they may. There is no easy way to live for Christ in a sinful world. Matthew was willing to take such a stand and proved his willingness to follow Christ. Jesus chose him to be one of His apostles.

Would Pay

Jesus also saw a man who was willing to pay the cost. Luke 14:33, *"So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."* This requires placing Jesus Christ and His will above everything and everyone else. Until one is willing to do that he cannot be the disciple of Christ that he must be. Matthew was one who was willing to do that. He was willing to pay the cost.

Could it be that many of us want the blessings and benefits of being a Christian but are unwilling to assume the duties? Do we expect to receive the blessings but are not ready to put Him first in all things? Do we have the right to expect to *"sow the wind"* and then escape the whirlwind of consequences of our conduct? We can be forgiven of the guilt of sin, but many times we must reap the harvest of misspent hours, days and years. Are we willing to do as did Matthew who forsook all and followed Jesus? This is what He calls us to do!

What did Jesus offer Matthew? Matthew probably turned from a life that gave him luxury, wealth, the pleasures of sin and turned to a life of poverty and suffering. But he also turned to a life of sacrifice and service to God and his fellowman. Christ gave Matthew the real reason for living. He gave Matthew the real purpose for existence. In addition, He gave Matthew that hope and expectation of living with God eternally. What more could one give another?

There is a song that says, "It is no secret what God can do. What He's done for others, He'll do for you." The Lord is calling each of us by His gospel to follow Him even as He called Matthew. Will we hear His voice and obey Him in faith, repentance, confession of Him, and baptism into Him for the remission of sins and be added to the company of the saved, which is the church? Then having been raised to walk in newness of life, live before Him faithfully. That is what is required to answer our call.

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The Undenominational Church

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 127:1, "*Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.*" Matthew 15:13, "*But he answered and said, Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up.*" Proverbs 14:12, "*There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*" Jeremiah 10:23, "*O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps.*"

The leading thrust of these passages is that there is a way for man that pleases God, and there are ways that displease Him. It makes a difference what a person believes, does and thinks.

Unless that which a person follows it the way of God it is in vain. Destruction awaits that which is not of God.

This is true with respect to the church. The popular idea is that one church is as good as another. But since the Bible is true, we contend this doctrine is false. Churches make a difference. While some contend it makes no difference, we urge and demand that Biblical authority for such an idea be presented, and we have never had that request met by anyone.

What do we mean by "the undenominational church?" Without the existence of denominations we would not have to use such a phrase. But denominations are abundant in number. Many have been so ingrained in denominationalism that they find it difficult to conceive of the church without a denominational concept of it.

What Is Not Meant

Let us first discover some things we do not mean by the phrase. We do not mean a church that includes all denominations. Such a mass of confusion would certainly not be a credit to God. Nor do we mean a church that is a single denomination. There is no authority in the New Testament for any denomination.

We are not talking about something that is generally known as Catholic, Protestant or any such thing. These are denominations. The undenominational church would not fit in any such category. We are glad we are not called upon to defend these denominations and their doctrines. We are equally glad we are not required to defend the history of either one.

We do not profess to be a denomination or a member of one. Denominationalism has been a plague on the religious scene. It breeds doubt, division, confusion and unbelief. It misrepresents God, the faith of Christ, His church as revealed in the Bible, and paves the way for atheism. The amalgamation of doctrines, creeds, disciples, catechisms, prayer books, manuals, confessions of faith and other such things, many of which are openly contradictory to the Bible and each other, makes it embarrassing for any person who will stay with Scripture to defend them. "*Thus saith the Lord*" is the plea of Scripture and not the doctrines of men. We do not mean any church founded by any man anywhere at any time, regardless of how honest, sincere and well-meaning and pious he may have been.

What We Do Mean

What we do mean is that that church which is separate and apart from all denominations, a church that is not a denomination, a church that has nothing to do with denominations. Let us be more specific.

We speak of that church that is a sacred institution, divine in origin, founded by Jesus Christ, purchased by His blood. God planned and prophesied the coming of the church (Ephesians 3:10,11). Jesus said He would build it (Matthew 16:16-18). It began on Pentecost (Acts 2). We speak of that one body (Ephesians 4:4,5) which is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23). This is the church over which Christ is head (Colossians 1:18). That church, rather than any denomination, is the one that existed before any denomination, and exists apart from them. That is the undenominational church.

Its Head

The undenominational church recognizes no human head. Any church that has a human as its head, man or woman, is not the undenominational church. Christ is the head of His church, the King of His kingdom, the elder brother in God's family, the chief Shepherd of God's flock. Nothing in Scripture denotes a visible, earthly head of the church. All authority belongs to Christ (Matthew 28:18). Everything is to be done according to His authority (Colossians 3:17).

Its Creed

The undenominational church does not subscribe or follow any human creed. The word "creed" means "I believe." The undenominational church has as its creed the Son of God and His revealed testament. Take a Bible and write on its cover, "The Creed Of The Undenominational Church." By that alone are we guided and bound. Any other message is prohibited (Galatians 1:6-9). Traditions of men are not to be equated with God's Word (Matthew 15:9). By His Word we shall be judged (John 12:48), not some creed of man. Second Peter 1:3, "*God hath given us all things that pertain to life and godliness.*" Second Timothy 3:16,17 teaches the Scriptures to be inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative and all-sufficient. It is all we need and all we are allowed. That Word of God is the final court

of appeal. The reason we believe what we believe is because the Scripture teaches it. The reason we do not believe what others may believe is because the Scriptures do not so teach. That is the characteristic of the undenominational church.

Its Name

The undenominational church is identified by terms found in Scripture, like churches of Christ, church of God, more often than any other, simply, the church. Members are Christians. No denominational and divisive names are supplied or warranted. Denominations pride themselves in their distinct names, doctrines, practices that separate them from others. But it also separates them from the undenominational church of the Bible.

Its Practice

The undenominational church follows the distinct New Testament plan and pattern of worship, work, entrance into the church, life in the church. While the world suffers beneath the yoke of denominationalism, those who will take what the Bible teaches quickly learn the difference between what the Bible teaches and what is prominent and dominant in the religious world.

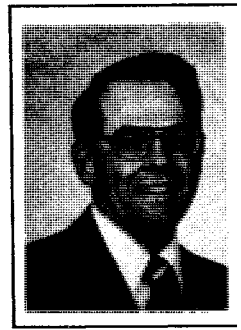
We would put forth this proposition for all to consider. If men would throw away their creeds, human heads of their churches, divisive names, distinctive doctrines, man-made traditions and practices, and take God at His Word, and take only God's Word, the plague of denominationalism and all its attendant havoc would vanish from the face of the earth. Then atheism, communism, humanism, heathenism and all other forms of anti-God ideologies could be confronted with a tremendous wealth of resources, manpower and truth. Salvation for the teeming billions of the world could become a reality.

Realistically speaking, this is not likely to occur, not because it is not right, but because too many people are wedded and welded to their denominations. Their pride and desire to "do their own thing" will prevent it. But regardless of what most may do, this is the cause and the plea of faithful Christians.

Where Is It?

(continued on Back Cover)

Is there an undenominational church in the world today? We are sure there is. But even if at this moment there was not one congregation anywhere, taking the Word of God, the seed of the kingdom (Luke 8:11), we can go forth and sow the seed into good and honest hearts, and the harvest that will be reaped will be the undenominational church. To produce denominations somebody will have to sow the tares of men. The gospel will produce only His church.



JAMES W. BOYD

Those who believe and obey the gospel of Christ compose the church, and, remaining faithful therein, are the undenominational church. It is the same church of which we all can read in Scripture. It is the church that Christ promises to save (Ephesians 5:23).

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The end of the year approaches and the mails will be overflowing. Therefore, this will likely be the last mailing of our booklet until after the mailing rush is over. Be looking for our next issue shortly after the first of the coming year

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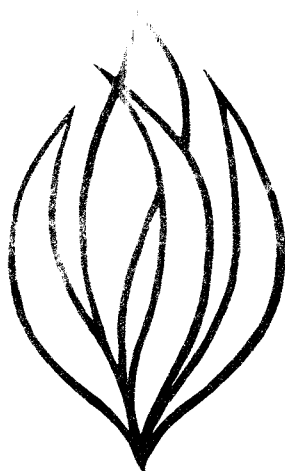
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“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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Part Of The Gospel

Back Cover

A Great Hypocrisy

We would not attempt to define what is the greatest hypocrisy that might be practiced by those who are members of the church. None of us could really know for sure. But this lesson will focus attention on what must surely be one of the most serious inconsistencies and duplicities presently evident in the ranks of the body of Christ. We shall begin by being reminded of two truths which may at first seem unrelated. But we intend to tie them together shortly.

Let us be reminded of the evil and danger of hypocrisy of any kind. All one must do is read Matthew 23 and he cannot avoid knowing the Lord's displeasure with hypocrisy. A hypocrite is a pretender, a deceiver, not what one claims to be, but one who feigns to be what he actually is not. A hypocrite is one who says he believes something but practices and acts quite differently from his alleged conviction.

Religion is just one area where hypocrisy is evident. The business world, sports arenas, politics, in society generally, hypocrisy is a dominant stain. But nowhere is it more repugnant than in religion which deals with man's soul and eternity as well as his relationship with God and his fellowman.

An Inward Disease

Hypocrisy is a spiritual disease that gnaws and destroys from within rather than from without. Doctors know that internal diseases are more difficult to detect and treat than those that are visible and on the surface. Decay within the church weakens the power of the church to fulfill its divine obligations. It is embarrassed before those who are not Christians. A solid ledge of rock can withstand constant and heavy bombardment, but a hollow shell will crumble beneath the least pressure. This is what hypocrisy does to the church, making it hollow and weak before the world. While we need not belabor the evils of hypocrisy, because most will agree, probably few of us are really aware of just how deadly it really is.

Concern For Souls

The second truth is that Christians should have a keen and

aggressive interest in those souls still lost in sin. We cannot see the soul as we can a material object, therefore, it may be difficult for us to grasp how horrible it is for the soul to be damned. It is not easy to comprehend a soul banished into eternal hell. We might bring the seriousness of it closer, however, if we should think of ourselves as being among the lost. Or consider your loved ones being destined for hell. We usually disassociate the unpleasantness of such things from ourselves and think entirely of others in this context. But we make a serious mistake to be so confining in our thinking. Not only is the pagan, heathen, murderer, thief, etc. lost, but there are others that are lost also.

What does it mean to be lost? Picture if you can being separated from Deity for eternity, separated from Christian friends and loved ones forever. In heaven is where all will be good and in hell evil dominates everything. Furthermore, there is no hope for anything better or any relief from torment. To know that others are enjoying bliss, a bliss that could have also been ours to enjoy, will only add to the grief and despair.

Why He Came

Why did Christ come to this sinful world? Was it not to seek and save the lost? Was it not because of His interest in saving those who are lost? Why did Andrew go and find Peter? Why did Peter preach to Cornelius? Why did Philip preach to the Ethiopian? Why did Christ talk with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman? Why did Paul make his journeys taking the gospel? Was it not because they loved the souls of the lost and wanted to obey the Lord in taking the saving gospel to them?

We sing in a song, "A charge to keep I have." What is the charge? Mark 16:15 expresses it adequately. "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*" This is it in a few words. Christ sent His apostles first to the lost sheep of Israel. He sent out the seventy. He commissioned His apostles to take the message of truth everywhere. They went; they taught; and it was because they had love, pity, compassion, sympathy and concern for the souls of lost people.

That same Master is calling for His people today to do the same thing and preach the same message He commissioned His apostles to reveal to the world. As someone suggested, "We have been saved to save." We save others by making sure they have opportunity to be saved by hearing the saving truth. Peter admonishes us to follow in the Master's footsteps. Can we claim

to be doing that if we are not attentive to the lost?

Are We Serious?

Let me tie these two truths together for an obvious application. Are we too bold to suggest that one of the greatest hypocrisies in the church today is the feigned and pretended interest in winning souls that are lost to the Savior? Before dismissing this accusation too hastily, consider a few things. We hasten to add that this plague is not with every Christian, thankfully. But it does exist with many of us.

How can church members be content to let the preacher be the sole soul saver? They seldom talk to anyone about salvation. They feel they have done their duty if they attend worship services, and possibly give a name to the elders or preacher to go visit. Is this really caring for the lost? Some seem to think that the burden of soul saving belongs only to a select few and they are excluded. What a mistaken concept! Where did anyone get the idea? When the church of the Lord was the fastest growing religious body in America there were untold numbers conducting classes in homes where the lost were being taught. Possibly the general public is not very interested in spiritual things, but how many of us are hiding behind that excuse rather than seeing how it emphasizes the magnitude of our task?

How can elderships and the flock they lead busy themselves in building playgrounds, gymnasiums, elaborate and ornate meetinghouses, employing large "staffs" of clerics to conduct the church when there are areas within a day's drive of their splendid edifices that have never heard the truth? How can members show more concern for a "church league ball game" than a program of cottage work? Why can we have twice the number present to a "fellowship dinner" than we can ever get to attend a visitation effort? At the same time we sing loudly and regularly about sending the light, going empty handed, and let funds pile up in the treasury while willing missionaries have to scurry about begging for support as they go to preach the gospel. It smacks of gross hypocrisy, honoring Christ only with our lips. Is the heart really there? Do not our actions betray where our heart really is? These food, fun and frolic promoters who erect their game rooms have much for which to answer before God and the lost of the world.

Smaller religious groups, who do not preach the truth, are often doing more to take their false message to the world than

we who say we are the New Testament Christians, who profess to preach the saving truth. Why is that unless there is a blatant and arrogant pride and indifference? It reflects that too many of us must not really consider those religiously wrong are even lost. Can one be saved apart from hearing, believing and obeying the gospel? Some must evidently think so because taking the gospel to the lost world ranks far below having their plush offices, air conditioning, basketball courts, kindergartens, "Mother's night out," and other trivia and frivolities that dominate the activities and programs of many so-called churches of Christ.

It has been my misfortune to have been in the vestibule of a glamorous building where there are more trophies for bowling tournaments and softball playoffs than the number of people they have baptized into Christ an entire year. You can explain it, if you can, apart from gross hypocrisy, but how do you do it?

Shortage of Soundness

There is a growing shortage of sound gospel preachers throughout the brotherhood. We have applauded the "after dinner speaker" types and the entertainers until sound doctrine is no longer appealing. We seek to win numbers through deception, trickery, giving prizes, etc. "Rescue the Perishing" is a song that will damn the souls of many church members because they never offer one ounce of energy to accomplish what they sing. They only sing about it and hope the preacher or somebody else does it.

Eldershops can get more excited about buying a stove for the kitchen, paving the parking lot, cushioning the seats than spreading the gospel through literature, radio, television, gospel meetings, cottage programs or other means. Why should people who say they love the Lord have to constantly be begged to love the lost the Lord died to save?

Let us suggest two reasons, and these are not all, why so many of us suffer from this plague of unconcern and hypocrisy. (1) We are not impressed with the value of the soul, what it means to be lost, and that there is no salvation without the gospel. If a child was in the lake, or a man in a burning building, or an accident victim bleeding profusely, if some acted as many brethren do regarding saving souls, the child would drown, the man burn to death, and the victim bleed to death while we stood by arguing over the best way to make plans to maybe begin to get started to think about possibly doing something sometime when the time gets right.

Takes Both

Yes, proper and scriptural methods are important. But the message must be heard. We have fumbled about methods until we have have ignored getting out the message. Some can talk at great length about methods but are not adequately familiar with the message. We need to remember that the methods for proclaiming the truth are not necessarily the same that often proves effective in proclaiming error.

The church is plagued today with what is called "Crossroadism." That system is wrong because it promotes false doctrine and is cultish in its nature. It is contrary to New Testament structure and divisive everywhere it goes. But the fields are ripe unto harvest for this and other false philosophies because of the inactivity and deadness of many so-called "conservatives" who have disgusted many people because of doing nothing. In their disgust many have been provoked to accept anything that shows life. Indifference and lethargy breeds error and cultivates the ground for false ideas.

Death and the devil will not wait while we put money on certificates of deposit and draw interest on money, making sure we have enough in case there is ever another depression like the one over a half century ago. So many brethren are still living in the dark and distant past without regard for the lost souls of the present. Such blindness hampers the cause of Christ!

(2) A second reason this plague exists among us is due to the lack of a sense of personal responsibility. Poor George! Everybody says and thinks, "Let George do it!" George is probably the preacher. Unless the preacher leads the way, organizes everything, conducts most of the classes, as well as preparing to deliver his heavy schedule of public proclamations, writings, visits, etc., nothing is done. It is talked about, but nothing done. Why? Who really care about the lost of which we glidly speak and say we love?

Of the few baptized where you attend, how many are due to your direct influence? Of those restored, who came back because you showed an interest? Did you confine your interest to simply telling somebody else about them and hoping somebody else would see about them? That is often the way.

Then And Now

Acts 15:35 tells about Paul and Barnabas preaching and

teaching “with many others.” Does this sound like the congregations of today? Is there no justice in calling our behavior hypocrisy?

When brethren return to an understanding of the work of the church, that it is not schools, camps for fun, ball games, socials, pep rallies, entertainment, etc., possibly more souls, presently doomed and damned, can be saved. Do you suppose we will be a factor in returning to that time?

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Why God Gave The Bible

All of the efforts put forth in a faithful local church are based on the Bible. The teaching, the benevolent work, the everyday life of those who make up the membership, the worship, everything is governed by the foundation on which we stand, the revelation in the Bible. The Bible is upheld above every book and relied upon because we believe it is the Word of God as is affirmed in Second Timothy 3:16,17.

Evil men would not and could not have written the Bible. It condemns so much of which they are guilty that they would not have written it and condemned themselves. Nor would uninspired good moral men have written the Bible. Moral men would not lie, claiming their work was God's Word when they knew it was not. Even though the Bible was written by the pen of men, they were men that were chosen, guided and directed by God. God chose from their individual vocabularies the very words of the Bible to convey His will and mind to mankind. Because of this, they had supernatural knowledge of things no man could possibly have known or revealed from his own findings, discoveries or experiences, “...but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” (Second Peter 1:21). The Scriptures are inspired of God.

Therefore, the Bible is the standard by which we ought to live because it is the standard by which all shall be judged. But why did God give mankind the Bible? Let us suggest some general answers to this question, and then turn our attention to some things more specific as it concerns our relationship with God.

We Need It

Mankind cannot and could not get along without the Bible. God made man, knows man, is aware of man, his needs, weaknesses and strengths. Without the message from our Creator we could never expect to be complete. We need to know about ourselves. We learn from the Bible that we are not only body but also spirit. We are living souls. We are creatures of choice and have the power of volition. We can determine many things concerning ourselves. There is more to us than the physical. We have mind and are spirit.

We need to know about our Creator. The Bible reveals to us the nature of Deity. Jesus Christ on earth revealed God unto man in a measure never known prior to His coming. We must know His standards by which He expects us to live (John 12:48). We need to understand the central personality of the entire system of salvation who is Jesus Christ. All of this is in the Bible. But let us consider four very simple, yet profound, reasons why God gave us the Bible. All four of these reasons have to do with our relationship to God.

We Are Lost

God gave us the Bible so we could know that we are lost when separated from Him. Without the divine revelation, how could we know of our spiritual condition? Isaiah wrote, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way."* (Isaiah 53:6). Some may ask why it is so bad to go your own way. The answer is simply expressed in Jeremiah 10:23. *"It is not in man that walketh to direct his own steps."* Whether people are willing to admit it or not, man, left to himself, always degrades himself. He does not have the capacity, standing alone, to lift himself. Not only does the Bible teach this, giving examples of this, but the history of man proves this.

Man is guilty of sin (Romans 3:23), which is a violation of God's law (First John 3:4). Because of sin man is spiritually lost, separated from his Creator (Isaiah 59:1,2). He must be brought to a keen awareness of this reality. This very fact is a powerful motivating factor and incentive for man to return to God.

The Bible tells us what it means to be lost and what awaits those who live this life and leave it, still lost. We all have sinned and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). From what other

source can mankind learn of his spiritual condition?

God's Desire To Save

Again, God gave man the Bible to inform man that God does not want any of His creatures to be lost. God created man with the power of choice, but God wants man to choose the right way. Peter stressed that the Lord *"is not willing that any should perish."* (Second Peter 3:9). *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life."* (John 3:16). If man is lost it will not be because God wants him to be lost. Anyone who is lost and remains lost does so because they have chosen that path in spite of God's wishes for him.

Nothing proves that God wants man saved more than the invitation extended to man to *"come unto me"* and be forgiven and saved from sin. It is from the Bible that we learn of this compassion, grace, mercy and love that God has for sinful man. Where could we learn such majestic truth as this except from God's own revelation of His own mind?

What God Has Done

Again, God gave us the Bible to teach us what He has done in order that we might be saved. Step by step, the Scriptures unfold the great design of God for saving man. From the time of the curse against the serpent (Genesis 3:15), the call of Abraham and the many promises that God gave to and through him, including the one that teaches *"...and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."* (Genesis 12:3). God told Abraham that through his seed would come the One who would fulfill that promise (Genesis 22:16). Paul makes it clear that this *"seed"* had reference to Christ (Galatians 3:16). As we read the Bible we understand that the remainder of it from the time of God's promises to Abraham is actually a divinely given record of how God kept His promises to Abraham. There came the nation of Israel and the law given to that nation through Moses on Mt. Sinai. We read the prophetic messages of the prophets as they foretold the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom. Eventually we reach the time of the forerunner of Christ, John the Baptist, and his preparatory work before Him. Finally, the Savior comes upon the scene, lives a perfect life, performs the confirming miracles, only to be betrayed, crucified and buried.

But on the third day He was raised from the dead as victor over death, hell and the grave. Now, through Him, mankind could be offered eternal life and forgiveness of sins. He established His church on the first Pentecost after His resurrection, and through inspired men the terms of salvation were announced. From that time forward, those who hear the Word, believe the Word, and obey the Word have been added to the church as saved people.

It is not too much to reduce the plan of salvation to simply saying, "The way to heaven is Christ and His church." God provided the Redeemer and His blood by which we are washed clean from sin.

From where could man ever know all that God has done to demonstrate His love and grace through His Son except there be God's revelation concerning it? This is one of the reasons why we have the Bible and can know of the mighty works of God to extend to us the glories of heaven and the way of escape from the eternal fires of hell.

What Man Must Do

But another reason God has given us the Bible is to inform man of man's part in God's plan to save man. From the Scriptures we learn our duty. We not only can know we are lost, that God wants us to be saved, what God has done to save us, but what we must do to be saved. It is recorded for us in the Bible, the sacred and inspired writing from God.

Man cannot be saved without obedience to Christ. *"And being made perfect, he became the author of salvation to all them that obey him."* (Hebrews 5:9). There is something man must do to be saved. *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 7:21).

Only God can prescribe the terms of pardon. Man must be saved on God's terms or he will not be saved. God has provided the way, but man must go that way. This is not difficult to comprehend. It is a matter of eternal life or death, separation from God, that we are considering. To reject His terms means to be *"punished with everlasting punishment from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power."* (Second Thessalonians 1:9). Surely, nobody should want this for eternity!

To be saved we must believe. *"Without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is,*

and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”
(Hebrews 11:6).

Coupled with that faith must be our obedient response to the divine commands to repent (Luke 13:3), confess our faith in Christ (Romans 10:9,10), and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; Galatians 3:27).

Once again we ask, how could any of us ever know what God wants us to do except He has given us His mind in the Bible? There is no other source of information other than His Word.

But let us be sobered by the fact that we must either abide by what the Lord God has decreed or there is no word of comfort or hope for us anywhere in His Word. Rather, there is the warning of the wrath and justice of God against the evildoer, and those who obey not the gospel (Second Thessalonians 1:9).

How To Live

From the Bible we learn how to live after coming to Christ. We learn how to treat other people, truth about the institution of marriage and the home, everything that has any real substance and importance in living acceptably before God. It is all governed and determined by the message from God. His inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient Word, the Scriptures, the Bible, will furnish us all we need to live properly and be able to stand prepared in the judgment.

One final and very serious word of caution. Seeing how God has given us His Word, and that which is revealed therein, to disobey Him is tantamount to telling God that He wasted His time, at least as far as we are concerned. We are telling Him that He need not have bothered. We are saying that His revelation is useless, meaningless and unimportant to us. And we must wonder if that is the way we really want things to be when we stand before God in judgment to receive our eternal sentence of reward or punishment.

On the other hand, to obey is to proclaim to God our thanksgiving for His merciful kindness and blessings. It is to declare His will as the vital and essential declaration to man that it truly is. It is to say that it is our intention and purpose to walk according to His way so long as life remains in the body. Then we can depart for the next world as one redeemed by the Son of God, and know the joy of heaven eternally.

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Flee, Follow, Fight

First Timothy 6:3-12, *"If any man teach otherwise and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, he is proud and knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envying, strifes, railings and surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness, from such withdraw thyself. But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world and it is certain that we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us therewith be content. But they that will be rich fall into a 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. But thou, O man of God, flee these things, and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness. Fight the good fight of faith. Lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses."*

Our Guide

We should appreciate such instruction and instructors that provide for us the right direction, good advice and godly counsel. Such is the nature of this inspired passage that we have presented by Paul. It is teaching that should govern the manner of our lives here on earth.

The two books that were written to Timothy primarily consist of two elements. One, they serve as guidelines for those who preach the gospel. Timothy was an evangelist. Obviously, some of the book is to him personally. Most of it is instruction that is applicable to all who would attempt to preach the Word. Two, the Word that preachers are to preach to others, especially to their brethren, are found in these books. Therefore, great portions of the text were written for the admonition and edification of any who would go to heaven through Christ. Paul told Timothy, Second Timothy 2:2, *"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou*

to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also.” So it is obvious that the words to Timothy were also words to which we all must give attention.

The text consists of three divisions. One, there are warnings against teaching false doctrines or following after such things. Two, there are exhortations to be content with such as we have materially. We came into this life with nothing and we shall leave the same way. We are stewards of certain things which God has given us for which we are to care and use responsibly for our limited time in this life. We are not to strive for material gain and lose the soul. Three, there is the three-fold instruction to flee, follow and fight. These three directives are designed as guidelines to direct and govern our lives as Christians. Upon these three we shall focus our attention in this lesson.

Flee

Paul tells us, verse 11, “*Flee these things.*” The inescapable inference is that it is not always cowardly to run from some things. To flee is the action of wisdom and prudence. To flee can reflect common sense, good judgment and respect for what is right and good. We are to flee from those things that can destroy the spiritual welfare of the soul. In living the kind of life the Lord would have us to live there are times when running is the proper and wise course and is in keeping with the will of God for us. There are those things from which we are to separate ourselves, including people as well as situations.

Flee What Things?

From what things are we to flee? This text concerns itself with money and the covetous grasp many have for it. The love of money is described as a snare or a trap. It is the devil’s device to capture the souls of people who are not cautious. Like when one drowns in deep and dark waters, being overcome and losing one’s life in the depths of the sea, so the love of money can overwhelm one into eternal perdition. The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. It feeds evil. People will commit almost any and every kind of transgression if they think it will pay them well in money. The love of money, both by the rich and the poor, has caused even those who had come to Christ to turn away and follow Him no more.

There are other things from which we are to flee. Second

Timothy 2:22 teaches us to “*flee youthful lusts.*” We should run from those opportunities to satisfy passions that are so strong and powerful in the days of youth. We must learn to control them and not remain with those people and in those circumstances where we are tempted to sin. The physical body was planned and designed by Almighty God and ought not be used for the dissipation of it and exploitation for sinful pleasure. Too many do not flee from such things but actually seek them out, daring the devil to ensnare them in transgression.

Paul taught in First Corinthians 6:18 that we are to “*flee fornication.*” This is such a prominent and promoted sin in our society, if we can believe the reports that we read and hear. There are so many evidences that more and more people have no respect for purity and chastity as God teaches people to have. The moral standards of American society have been lowered to alarming levels of base degeneracy and publicly paraded as the acceptable behavior and lifestyle today. But we read from the Bible that fornicators shall be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (Revelations 21:8). Like Joseph of old, when he was tempted but fled from the scene rather than sin against God, so should be our behavior.

We are told to “*flee idolatry.*” (First Corinthians 10:14). We are not to think that idolatry only consists of bowing before the images of pagan and heathen worship, or the statues of Romanism, even though this is included. Surely that is idolatry. But we can make most anything an idol. Whatever comes between us and God, and our dutiful service to God, becomes an idol to us. Not only can such things be evil, but they can even be things that are not evil in and of themselves, but because we put them first in our priorities and goals of life, many things that could be a blessing to us can become our undoing and become idols that will bring our condemnation eternally.

Why flee these things? The answer is found in verse ten of the text when Paul speaks of some being led astray from the faith and being pierced through with many sorrows. These words were written to Christian people and serve as warnings to flee lest it cost us our salvation in heaven. What an awesome price to pay for the paltry offerings of this sinful world!

We will have trials and tribulations in life without seeking them. But we sure do not want to flirt with them. We should pray that we not be led into temptation, and when we are tempted, that we will not yield. Flee such things for there is nothing to be gained in them, but everything to be lost.

Follow

The second instruction is to follow certain things. What are we to follow? Verse 11, *"Follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness."* These are traits of Christ, characteristics of the divine nature. To be righteous means to be harmonious with the Lord's will in the way we live. Godliness is reverence and respect for that which is holy and sacred. Faith, love, patience, meekness are qualities of character of Jesus that we are to add to our own characters and lives. Peter teaches us to add these things in Second Peter 1:5-11.

In living the Christian way of life there is a time to flee from wickedness, which is a defense mechanism to help us avoid sin. But there is also the positive side of being a Christian because there are things to follow and pursue. We must go where the Master wants us to go. This is the nourishing, constructive, needful and positive side of Christianity. We cannot live in a vacuum and total void. Our lives will be filled with something. They are to be emptied of evil but filled with these righteous traits Paul and others have listed in Scripture.

Fight

The third instruction is to *"fight."* That which we are to fight is the good fight of faith. See it clearly as we can. There is a time to flee, and a time to follow, and a time to fight. There exists that call to do battle against the devil and for the cause of Christ, standing our ground no matter what comes or what the cost and consequences may be. All fighting is not evil. There are those situations in life when a person must take a stand and fight for his convictions of truth, contending with all his moral fibre for what he knows to be right and just, not flinching in the process.

The reason Paul was prepared to die was because he had been a fighter in his lifetime. Second Timothy 4:6-8, *"For I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give unto me in that day, and not to me only, but to all them that love his appearing."*

Paul taught Timothy, First Timothy 1:18, *"This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before thee, that thou by them mightest war a good*

warfare.” Paul knew that being a Christian in a sinful world would necessitate a fight to survive.

The Nature Of Our Fight

Our fight is the fight of the faith. We do not wage carnal warfare to promote or protect the kingdom of God (Second Corinthians 10:4). Such is not the nature of the Lord’s kingdom (John 8:36). We are to equip ourselves with the armor of God so we can fight as we ought. Ephesians 6:11-13, *“Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand.”* Then he lists that armor as the armor of truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, and prayer. With these as our weaponry we are to fight for the way of the Lord among those of a sinful generation. We are never to be ashamed of the truth nor afraid to do battle for the cause of the right. We are in the Lord’s army and Christ is the captain of our faith (Hebrews 2:10). Second Timothy 2:3, *“Thou therefore endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”* Jude 3, *“Contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints.”* Paul said he was set for the defense of the gospel (Philippians 1:17).

To “A Man Of God”

With these three instructions to flee, follow and fight, words that are addressed to one who was a “*man of God*,” let us give heed to them as we rise and go forward toward the remainder of our lives to live for the way the Lord has died. Flee evil, follow good, fight the fight of faith. To do less is to sacrifice our salvation for this world that offers nothing but sin and death when all is said and done. For each of us there will come that time when all will be said and done.

It goes without saying that we want to go to heaven. The Lord’s words serve as a “*lamp unto our feet and a light unto our pathway*.” He pleads with all people everywhere that they be Christians. Having once heard, believed, repented, confessed Christ and been baptized into Him, we must continue to abide in

Him. This we do as we walk in the light as He is in the light (First John 1:7). May we soberly, seriously, reverently, intelligently and prayerfully consider and heed these three instructions to flee, follow and fight.

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Jesus As Lord

Second Corinthians 4:5, *"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."* The epistle of Second Corinthians was written by Paul, partially as a defense of his apostleship which some false teachers had denied. As evidence he was an apostle he made reference to what he had preached; the subject matter. The theme and focal point of it was Christ Jesus the Lord.

This should be the theme of preaching today. Too often people hear a "super market gospel" that takes what they want and leave what they prefer not to have. Preaching should be Christ-centered, everything based on the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and Lord of all.

"What think ye of Christ?" is an ancient but also modern question. When we think of Jesus we likely think of Him in a variety of ways. This lesson calls attention to Him as Lord and what this implies. Romans 10:9, *"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."* Peter affirmed, Acts 2:36, *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."* Often the Bible presents the phrase, *"Lord Jesus Christ."*

Meaning Of "Lord"

The word "lord" comes from the feudal system of centuries past. It means a ruler or governor, a master, one possessed with great authority and supreme power. Under the feudal system the lord owned the property and all those who lived on the property. He directed their lives, having absolute rule, with everyone in complete subjection and entirely dependent upon

the lord of the land.

The term "lord" is applied to Jesus. Christians are a people of His own possession (Titus 2:14). We have been bought with a price (Acts 20:28) and are not our own (First Corinthians 6:20). All authority belongs to Him (Matthew 28:18). When we consider the designations and identifications of Jesus we learn that the term "lord" properly applies to Him.

Other Terms

Jesus is the Christ. Peter said God made Him both Lord and Christ. These are two different words, but Jesus was both. The term "Christ" identifies Him as the Messiah, the anointed One, the One especially selected by the Father and chosen for a special purpose and mission. He fulfilled the prophecies of old concerning such a One. He came to reign over His spiritual kingdom. Andrew said to Peter, John 1:40,41, *"One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ."*

Jesus is specifically called the Word. John 1:1-3, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made."* Verse 14 says, *"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, [and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father], full of grace and truth."* Being Deity in the flesh while here on earth teaches us concerning the nature of the Word. He has always existed just as the Father and the Holy Spirit. He possessed pre-existence before taking on the form of man. Colossians 1:16,17, *"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him, and he is before all things, and by him all things consist."* Hebrews 1:1,2, *"God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds."*

The word "Word" is translated from the word "logos" which carries the idea of not only the message but also the messenger

or the one through whom the message comes. Jesus is "logos," both God's message and messenger.

Jesus is called *"Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."* (Matthew 1:23). Isaiah had prophesied nearly seven hundred years before the birth of Jesus that this would be one of His designations (Isaiah 7:14). The statement to Mary by the angel had reference to Jesus as the One who fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy. As Christ points to Jesus as the Anointed One, the Word reveals Him as the eternal one, God's message and messenger, Emmanuel shows Him to be God among men. Philippians 2:5-8 presents additional revelation of Jesus as Deity taking on the form and fashion of mankind.

Colossians 1:15, *"...who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature."* The term *"firstborn"* notes His rank above everything and everyone else. He was not a created being because He is eternal. But He ranks above all else. Second John 7, *"For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an anti-Christ."* John was determined that his hearers and readers understand the incarnation, Deity assuming the fleshly form of humanity.

To summarize to this point, Jesus is Lord, Christ, the Word, and Emmanuel. Each designation elevates Him to an exalted and unsurpassed position.

The Example

Jesus is also named as our example, a pattern, the standard, rule and guide by which all are to be measured. First Peter 2:21, *"For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."* Often the statement is made, "Actions speak louder than words." None would deny the power of example. God provided the Word but He also provided someone to imitate.

The words of Christ are powerful. His deeds gave His words greater significance. He did even as He said. Words without deeds are but noise. Deeds, even without words, can ring loud and clear. First Peter 3 teaches those whose mates are not Christians that being the right example may be the way to win their mate. In essence a good example is "preaching the word" by the power of a loyal, devoted, faithful example and demonstration of what a Christian is to be. Jesus is the example for all of us to follow.

Savior

We often consider Jesus as our Savior. The name "Jesus" is like the name "Joshua" which means Savior. Likely we prefer to consider Him in this way more than any other because without Him there is no hope for our salvation (Acts 4:12). Being our Savior (Ephesians 5:23), we receive from Him our hope, comfort and the fulfillment of the goal of this life.

From what does Jesus save us? 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."* Romans 6:23 warns, *"The wages of sin is death."* We are delivered from spiritual death by Christ.

Because of His sacrifice on the cross, He is our Savior. Hebrews 2:9, *"...that he by the grace of God should taste of death for every man."* He paid the price which was His own blood (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 9:12). We receive the forgiveness of our sins and redemption by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14). The Samaritans said it correctly, John 4:42, *"We believe... and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."* 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."*

King

Much is said in Scripture about Jesus as King. We shall present another lesson dealing with this identification of Jesus. Here we only wish to say that He is not altogether like other kings because He has all power, all authority in heaven and earth. None is His superior, or even His equal among kings. All of His enemies shall be overthrown. His kingdom is the spiritual kingdom, the church (Colossians 1:13). It is in the world although not of the world. Jesus said His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). Christians are the citizens of His kingdom; the gospel is the law of His kingdom; the world is the territory of His kingdom; and He is the King of His kingdom.

As King, Jesus is worthy of honor because He is the divine King and man must obey Him. It is true that some mocked Him while He was being humiliated, crying out, *"Hail, King of the Jews."* They laughed and objected at the sign Pilate had placed in three languages over His cross designating Him as King of the Jews. But it is true, nonetheless. Jesus is King of kings.

Priest And Judge

Is He not also called our High Priest, our Advocate, mediator and intercessor? (Hebrews 2:17,18; 4:14,15; 7:26-28; First John 2:1). When we stand before the judgment bar of God we shall see Jesus as Judge, the administrator of justice. Paul teaches and Peter tells us that when He comes He will judge the world. God had Paul to preach that God would judge the world by the One whom He raised from the dead (Acts 17:31). Jesus said we shall be judged by the *“word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.”* (John 12:48).

We can rightly consider Jesus in all of these designations and roles. Each designation gives emphasis to the fact that Jesus is the Lord. He is Master of all, Ruler of all, Owner of all. Paul so emphasized these things when the Holy Spirit caused him to write, *“Wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”* (Philippians 2:9-11).

† † † † †

Who Can Be Saved?

Matthew 19:23-26, *“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.”*

Some of the most mind-penetrating thoughts are provoked by questions. Jesus had been teaching concerning a variety of sins and duties. He taught God's law for marriage, which is one man, one woman, for one lifetime, and divorce permissible for only one cause and that cause is fornication. He taught man's need for a childlike faith, innocence, purity and said of such is the kingdom of heaven. He defined what to do to have eternal

life by answering the question of the rich ruler and how one must put anything and everything aside that is between him and his service to God which must come first.

When the rich man heard Jesus' answer, he went away sorrowful. Then Jesus spoke how hard it is for a rich man to enter heaven. His teaching gives emphasis to the difficulty involved. He illustrated this difficulty with a proverb of that day, that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. This is to be understood figuratively. Jesus is not teaching it was an impossibility because we read of some rich men who were pleasing to God. Riches alone will not condemn a person. But riches make it difficult because of the temptation to trust in riches rather than God. While riches can help us to serve God, if our attitude toward them is not correct, and our acquisition and distribution of them are not proper, riches can be a hindrance to us. Just being rich is no indication that God approves or disapproves of us. It just means being rich in this world's goods.

Not Without God

Jesus goes on to show that it is impossible for a rich man, or any other man, to be saved without God. *"With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."* The salvation of the rich is possible, but not apart from God. But with God it is possible. Heaven cannot be reached by "pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps." We can neither earn nor merit heaven. While we must do the part that God commands of us, we can go to heaven because God has offered to save us and provided by His grace a mercy a Savior that we need. We can be thankful for the scheme of redemption, without which there could be no salvation for anyone.

Many then, and many now, confuse prosperity in the material realm as a sign of spiritual acceptance. Even the disciples seemed to have this concept when they asked, *"Who then can be saved?"* If the rich, who were considered somewhat, could not be saved without God, who could be saved at all? Let us look into the New Testament and learn who can be saved.

Sins Forgiven

Those that were saved in the New Testament record were those whose sins were forgiven. Romans 4:7,8, *"Blessed is the man whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered."*

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Sin is what condemns us. When sins are forgiven, blotted out, remembered against us no more, then Satan's grip is broken and we are redeemed. During the personal ministry of Jesus He often spoke men's sins forgiven. Since Pentecost sins are forgiven according to His will that requires faith and obedience. We are saved when our sins have been taken away by the blood of Christ. There is no other way to be forgiven.

Matthew 9:2, *"And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee."* Does not Jesus show that spiritual sickness is worse than physical sickness by attending to the man's greatest need first? Some are physically strong who are spiritually weak. Such was the case with Samson. Paul was just the opposite, having some physical infirmity (we know not what it was), but he was a spiritual giant. Nobody is denied the blessing of salvation because of a physical malady. The sick need saving. We have taken people from their hospital beds and baptized them into Christ. The sick and the healthy need saving and can be saved. Often when one is sick he is more receptive to the reality of his need and the certainty of death and will obey when he might otherwise refuse to obey. Who can be saved? The sick can be saved.

Not Nationality

In Acts 8 we read of the Samaritans and the Ethiopian being saved. Paul preached the message of salvation to Jew and Gentile alike when he traveled about the world. Nationality saves no one and does not prevent anyone from being saved. Peter 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."* (Acts 10:34,35). Neither race, ancestry, parentage, color of skin nor any such thing keeps one from the need of salvation or the possibility of salvation. While people sometimes get caught up in their prejudices and preferences, we must remember that God loves every human being and Jesus died for the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2). National, sectional, racial, economic, social nor educational barriers ought never be considered a factor in reaching for lost souls. The gospel is for all nations.

Not Social Status

That social standing makes no difference in salvation is prominently emphasized in Philemon, a freeman, and Onesimus, a slave. Paul recognized what was a social difference but these two Christians were to treat one another as Christian brothers because they were brothers in the Lord. 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."* Such things do not matter with God.

Peter was once called *"unlearned,"* while Paul was accused of being mad because of his much learning. But learned or unlearned, they both were among the saved. Joseph of Arimathaea was rich, and many of the disciples of Jesus were poor, even beggars. But both classes of people are listed as people of God. Christ and His apostles preached to kings, lawyers, tentmakers, merchants, publicans, fishermen, whoever and whatever. What do we learn from this? Regardless of occupation, education, wealth, social status, all need to be saved and all could be saved. All who obey Him are comfortable, happy, and at ease together in the church of the Lord. Since the Lord makes no distinction along these lines, who are we, His disciples, to legislate to do otherwise?

Notice some others were saved back then. Some had been guilty of adultery (John 3:3-11). Jesus did not condone that sin, but showed that even this hideous sin can be forgiven and the sinner saved.

What They Were

Consider the kind of people the members of the church in Corinth had been. First Corinthians 6:9-11, *"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, 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 God."* They once were such people who were lost, but they did not remain that way. Being forgiven, they were clean. Even such wicked people can be saved if they come to Christ.

The Jews were guilty of murdering the innocent Son of God.

Peter accused them of this very thing (Acts 2:36). But he gave them heaven's instructions and when they complied with them they were added to the saved. Paul wrote, 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."* He had been guilty of many crimes against the Lord as he made havoc of the church, but he had taken advantage of God's mercy and now was among the saved.

Even a backslider can be saved if he will return. Acts 8 tells us of a man named Simon who heard the Word, believed, and was baptized. Later Peter described him as being *"in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."* His heart was not right. But he could be restored if he would repent and pray to God for forgiveness which is the privilege of a child of God. The wayward, negligent, and unfaithful can all be saved if they follow the Lord's way back to Him.

We understand, therefore, that no matter how wicked a person may become, all sinners can be saved. This was the purpose of the mission of Christ to earth. He made it possible. There is not one that is forbidden if the way of salvation is followed. The great commission extends the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15). Revelation 22:17, *"And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."* This sounds the death of the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination and the necessity of a direct operation of the Holy Spirit before one can be saved.

While all can be saved, all will not be saved. We change the question from, *"Who can be saved?"* to *"Who will be saved?"* Those who do the will of God will be saved (Matthew 7:21). One must hear the gospel, believe in Christ, repent of his sins, confess his faith in Christ, and be baptized in water by the authority of Christ for the remission of sins and into Christ, rising to walk in newness of life, living faithfully according to the gospel of Christ. We have God's own Word that those who follow this way, His way, will be saved from past sins and in heaven at last. Those who do not obey His plan have no word of hope extended to them in all the pages of the Bible. No man can change God's way. It is either obey God, or remain lost.

There is one final question each of us should ask. We know who can be saved. We know who will be saved. But are we among those who will be saved? That depends on what we do. What shall it be with you?

† † † † †

Part Of The Gospel

"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." (Mark 16:15,16).

Some teach that baptism is not a part of the gospel, will not preach that it has anything to do with salvation, and contend that one can be saved without ever obeying it. Inconsistently, they also teach one must be baptized to "obey Jesus." Can one be saved and not obey Jesus?

People were to be baptized. Where would they learn that except from what was preached to them? Where would they learn what to believe except from what was preached to them? How would they know believing and being baptized was to be saved except from what was preached to them? How could they know disbelief would damn them except from what was preached to them? What was to be preached to every creature? Christ said the gospel was to be preached.

When one hears the gospel preached he will know to believe, what to believe, to be baptized, and why to be baptized. If he does not believe he will not be concerned about baptism but will be damned for unbelief.

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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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Illegitimate Children

Our lesson concerns a very serious moral problem that has devastating repercussions upon society, the economy, and the spiritual welfare of many people. It is a problem that threatens to erode civilization and respect for the Word of God. We are told that one of six children born in our nation are illegitimate. In some ethnic groups the rate is over fifty per cent.

An illegitimate child is a child born of a woman, the father of which is not the husband of the woman, therefore, the child does not bear the father's name. It is a child born out of wedlock. The child is born as the result of sinful sexual conduct.

The extent of this problem has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years due to the so-called "new morality," which has given license to any and every kind of sexual relationship without limit. Thousands upon thousands of children are being born to unwed parents. Homes are operated for unwed mothers, government expenditure increasing for both the care of the mother as well as the children. Many of these mothers are teenagers, if not most of them. This does not take into account the thousands upon thousands of unborn children who are murdered each year by some form of abortion, legal and illegal. The figures are staggering because of their enormity, and grow upward year by year.

Nor does this take into account the lowered morals of those who conceive the child out of wedlock but who are married before the child is born. Marriage does not place a robe of sanctity around illicit sexual relationships that occurs before marriage. The child born of pre-marital sex is not counted, however, as an illegitimate child even though the child was illegitimately conceived.

There is no way to be accurate regarding the extent of the fornication and adultery that evidently runs rampant in society. The shame and disgrace of conceiving a child out of wedlock, bearing a child out of wedlock, being sexually immoral has been removed to a great extent because of the acceptance by society of sin, the defiance of the will of God, the lack of consistency among religious people between word and deed, the general decay of morality across the board. The sin regarding illegitimate children is not a sin of the children. It is actually a misnomer to declare the child illegitimate as if the child was in some way evil.

The child is as innocent of sin as any other child. The man and woman who produce the child are the ones who are illegitimate and immoral. The extent and influence of their sin resounds far beyond the birth of the sinless child.

No Double Standard

Sin is no more chargeable to the woman than to the man, or vice versa. Even though the world has often had a double standard in such matters, there never was a double standard with God. The shame of the double standard has been largely removed in recent years because now more and more people do not consider it shameful to violate God's laws of morality anymore. While women may bear more of the problems caused by a child born out of wedlock, this due to the physical production of the child, giving birth, caring for the child, and finding ways to support the child, the guilt of sin is as damnable to one as the other. Many men have been led to believe that if the woman with whom they commit fornication should conceive that the problem is altogether her problem. But both have contributed to the damnation of the soul of each other.

We hear a lot of talk today on the subject of abortion that the woman should be given the right over her own body. Nobody disputes that. What some deranged minds cannot understand is that she has exercised the control over her body when she gave herself to illicit relationships. Once a child has been conceived, there is more than just her body that must be considered. She had control over her body and she ignored the sin and responsibility that inescapably accompanies this conduct.

The problem of illegitimacy, illicit sex, is not confined to any one social or economic level of people. It is a moral infection that has invaded the rich, poor, educated, uneducated, black, white, and every group, including church-going people. Many are aroused over the social problem and the health problems, but not so much because of the offenses against morality. They are aroused because of the increasing tax burden this wilful defiance of God has produced. The costs are rising and the burden is appalling. But the Christian is concerned because of his hatred of sin and love for souls. It is this moral and spiritual failure and breakdown that grieves the heart of the child of God far more than any other related consequence.

Teach Morality

It is true, however, that this scar of sin occurs far less among those who have been taught morality, who know they are not merely animals that have evolved, who realize they are responsible before God and man for their behavior, and who retain some self-respect and personal dignity. Anyone who does not have respect for the value of Bible study, religious training, moral teaching, Christian principles and human dignity simply does not understand the only remedy and solution to this increasing blight among humankind.

Once it is known that a child has been conceived out of wedlock there are great problems to those involved. The first impulse is to chastise and rebuke those who sin. But it is really too late for preaching. If preaching is to be done it must be the condemnation of sin and the plea for repentance that seeks forgiveness. But what has been done cannot be undone. There is no way that minimizes the enormity of the sin, however.

Parents weep many tears wondering, "Were did we go wrong?" regarding their children who get so involved. Very likely it is not what was done wrong, but what was not done at all. It is frightening to know that over half of those under twenty years of age are receiving no kind of moral training from anybody anywhere. The neglect of proper guidance and teaching is a tragedy. Providing biological information and "birth control" devices does not resolve the problem. The problem is morals and respect for God. When this is either neglected by parents, or ignored by youths, what else can be expected except the results of sin and the just recompense of reward? It is a spiritual tragedy of the worst sort.

Disobedience

What all must come to realize is that illicit sexual relationships are demonstrations of disregard for God. It is a gross disrespect for His authority. It is sin. Many who know the truth ignore the truth. Mere knowledge of God's will is not enough, even though essential. There must be the determination to comply with His will. With this "do-your-own-thing" attitude that is so prevalent today, and being promoted on every hand, illegitimate children are inevitably some of the consequences.

Illicit sexual activity is sometimes provoked by the lack of security in the home. With the enormous divorce rate, single parent homes, mothers working outside the home and children cared for by others, the security level for many children is at rock

bottom. They seek companionship and acceptance. When parents are so busy they cannot take care of their children, seeking acceptance themselves from almost any quarter, their children act similarly and find themselves in sin.

Boys have deceived girls into suggesting that sex is a proof of "love." It is the very opposite when the sex proposed is between two who are not married. Nobody who really loves another will ask that they damn the soul to prove anything. You do not prove love through sin. You prove love by refusing to sin.

Weak fathers, dominant mothers, children even with plenty of money but a scarcity of morals, creates insecurity and feelings of not being wanted. To feel wanted, many have dissipated their bodies in fornication. Empty houses, loose supervision, worldly ambitions, peer pressure and the neglect of God in the home is at the root of the whole sordid and hideous scene. The craving for pleasure, material things, attractiveness and getting ahead have ruined the lives and eternities of millions.

Can We Blame These?

Some have blamed society, finances, education and other factors that likely have contributed somewhat to illicit conduct. But there are many who are poor, who live in deprived areas, who have not have every educational opportunity, but who have been taught truth, who are not among the immoral.

There will ever be the natural curiosity among the young about the opposite sex. Parents have failed to teach children regarding the body. As a result, many today are clamoring for the schools to do the job, often by teachers who are so stupid as to think that sex can be properly presented in a vacuum of moral teaching. True, too many children get their "facts of life" from the back alley, restrooms, locker rooms, dirty jokes and filthy conversation. But this only aggravates the problems.

The disrespect for God's laws regarding marriages, the sacredness of marriage, the permanency of marriage, faithfulness in marriage, the laws of God as to who is and is not marriageable, all have paved the way for the moral breakdown that brings children into the world with father and mother not married to each other. Some are led to think that all sexual activity is evil rather than a beautiful, God-given expression reserved for those who are married to each other.

Even in the church there are those who have left God's law about marriage and divorce, granting divorces for any cause,

granting the right to marry to almost anybody, no discipline in the church toward those who defy God's teaching. They have surrendered to the ways of the world and are trying to accommodate sin and convert God to fit sinful mankind. We should not think that God will hold such false brethren guiltless of their false doctrines and wicked practices which they promote.

The Solution

The only real solution to the problem is to prevent illicit sexual conduct. Once one has sinned we must strive for the conversion of the heart, repentance and restoration through forgiveness. But why should so many have to suffer the agony of sin, the disgrace of bearing a child out of marriage, the regret and pain that shall forever follow? Why must there be the flow of grief that sin brings? God has given us the way to go. Why should we not walk His way?

There must be a recognition that fornication is sin. Galatians 5:19-21 is a list of "*works of the flesh*" which if practiced prevents entrance into the kingdom of God. The first two sins are adultery and fornication. Ephesians 5:3 teaches that fornication is not even to be named among saints. Colossians 3:5 mentions fornications that are to be mortified or put to death. "*Abstain from fornication*" is the instruction of First Thessalonians 4:3. First Corinthians 6:18, "*Flee fornication.*"

Among the works of the flesh is also lasciviousness. This is that which inclines toward lewd and immoral thoughts and actions. Therefore, there should be teaching against the modern dances, pornographic literature, running with the "fast crowd," late hours, and other such things that provoke the loss of control of passions. The skimpy attire and immodest clothes many wear in order to be fashionable have tempted the very sinfulness that results in children being born out of wedlock. Petting, beach parties, filling the mind with the sex-oriented movies and television programs all contribute to the breakdown of moral restraint and obedience to God.

Forgiveness

Sin can be forgiven. But the scars of sin plague the one who commits sin throughout the rest of life. This is surely so evident with the sin of illicit sex that results in conception of a new life. Regret is a difficult matter to overcome. "*Be not deceived, God*

is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." (Galatians 6:7). Efforts to cover the fornication and birth of children conceived out of wedlock do not succeed. Giving the child for adoption seldom really solves the problem. At best, it only shifts it elsewhere. Marriage can partially cover conception out of wedlock as far as giving the child a name. But only the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse the souls stained in fornication.

We must provide for the oncoming generations a sense of purity, decency, morality, responsibility, security, proper companionship, care and genuine Christian love. We cannot rely upon the unwanted conceptions, the possibility of disease, and other such factors to motivate people to morality. We must teach them the love of God and respect for His ways. Only then can there be a significant dent made in the distress and shame of what is called the problem of illegitimate children.

† † † † †

I Never Have Understood It

There are many things that I do not quite understand, especially about the behavior of people. I have worked closely with people for thirty-five years as a gospel preacher, talking with them about their souls, dealing with what they considered to be their problems, trying as best I knew how to be of assistance to those who sought my help. It has been my good fortune to be with people in some of the happiest moments that life can afford. But I have been by the side of many who were suffering some of the darkness hours of life. All in all it has been, and I trust will continue to be, my lot in life to continue to have association with people of all ages and situations. What I have had opportunity to do is not different from what probably has been the case with every faithful gospel preacher.

But there is something about people, and I especially I have my brethren in mind, that has always been a major concern and has troubled

(continued on page 24)

Some Things For Which To Be Thankful

One of mankind's contemptible faults is his ingratitude. It reveals his greed, envy, egotism, selfishness, and how self-centered he is, because it indicates that he thinks the world and all around him exists just for him. He receives benefits and blessings from God and man, yet is not courteous and Christian enough to even express gratitude, by word or deed.

Thankfulness is one of mankind's noblest characteristics. Being grateful is as wonderful as ingratitude is contemptible. Nobody really likes the egocentric ingrate, but nearly everybody appreciates those who appreciate their blessings.

Too many are like the nine lepers who received healing from Christ, and not enough of us are like the one who was healed and returned to give thanks to Christ (Luke 17:11-20). Everybody ought to have the capacity to say, "Thank you," and mean it. Being thankful is to glorify God and displays respect for others who have done good on our behalf.

The reason gratitude is so admirable is because it is of divine origin. The Lord taught us to be grateful, in every age, to give praise and thanksgiving. Being grateful is a part of pleasing God.

We can be glad that our nation has a day called Thanksgiving Day. While it is not a religious holy day, as some would attempt to make it, the purpose behind it is good and the attitude it expresses is honorable. We have so much for which to be thankful. As we sing "Count your many blessings, name them one by one," we should realize that every good and perfect gift comes from God (James 1:17).

In the epistles penned by the apostle Paul we find many references dealing with giving thanks. Our lesson shall look at three things for which Paul said he was thankful, and for which he expressed gratitude.

For Faith

To the brethren in Colossee, "*We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus...*" (Colossians 1:3,4). The term "*faith*" is used in different senses in the New

Testament. It can denote the entire religion of Christ -- "*The faith.*" (Jude 3). It is used in that sense when Paul urged that we "*stand fast in the faith.*" (First Corinthians 16:13).

It can also refer to belief, trust and confidence given. We have faith in Christ. We believe in Him, place our trust and confidence in Him and all that pertains to Him. Such "*faith*" is an obedient faith, the faith that saves. We are saved by faith (Romans 5:1). It can be said that we are saved by faith (belief) in the faith (the religion of Christ) because of our faith (confidence and obedience) in Christ.

Our text uses the word "*faith*" in the sense of the belief the brethren in Colosse had. They believed in Christ Jesus. Paul was thankful for that because Christ had taught this to be necessary to be saved (John 8:24; Mark 16:16; John 3:16,18). Without faith we cannot please God (Hebrews 11:6). Paul loved these people and recognized them to be precious undying souls. He labored for their salvation. Knowing the absolute necessity that they believe, it is understandable why he would be thankful that they did.

It is no different now among Christian brethren. We are thankful for the faith of every person who does believe. How dark and difficult it would be for us if we stood alone. Many times, in many circumstances, we derive strength from the strong faith of others. It helps us to remain loyal to the truth. We sing. "We share our mutual woes, our mutual burdens bear, and often for each other flows the sympathizing tear." How is it that we can do this? It is because we believe the same things. We are united in the faith. We along with Pau¹ can be grateful for the faith others have in Christ Jesus our Lord. Are you not thankful today that others believe in Christ as do you?

For Love

Paul continued to say, verse 4, "*...and of the love which ye have to all the saints...*" Who is a saint? The world has come to consider the term to mean sinless, including perfection, or someone of the distant past who has been appointed to such a status by some ecclesiastical hierarchy. These are misconceptions of sainthood, according to Biblical teaching. A saint is simply a Christian; one who has been sanctified, set apart from the world and into Christ. He has been made holy by the forgiveness of his sins. A saint is a Christian. Paul called the Christian brethren in Corinth and Philippi "*saints.*" Love for

saints means love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. The word “*saint*” is used to refer to faithful brethren.

Being brethren means a difference with people, their feelings, attitudes and action one toward the other. Abraham would not allow differences to develop with Lot that might destroy their relationship and love for each other, and his reason was “...*for we be brethren.*” (Genesis 13:8). The arguments over the watering holes that existed between their respective servants posed a potential strife between them. Because of their love, Abraham would not allow it to continue. With one of the greatest manifestations of unselfishness recorded in the Bible, Abraham gave Lot his choice of land rather than break close ties.

Genuine love is the most powerful remedy for strife. More than anything else, it can prevent strife. When we love God and His truth, we will love one another. First Timothy 6:2, “*And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren...*” The relationship of master-slave left open potential strife, but being brethren made a difference. First Peter 1:22 urged the “*unfeigned love of the brethren.*” Our love is not to be hypocritical, feigned, pretended, but genuine, honest, and sincere. “*See that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.*” First Peter 3:8, “*Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous.*” Sincere love will manifest itself in deeds that show kindness, consideration, courtesy, helpfulness, going the extra mile, cooperation, each counting the other better than himself.

John 13:35, “*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*” We can be thankful that brethren love each other. It is sad when brethren miss the spirit of Christ, and condemn themselves, bringing reproach on the cause of Christ, by their bitterness toward each other, harboring hate and grudges, envy and jealousy. Holding on to false doctrines and dividing the people of God because of them places unfair and undue strain on the brotherhood.

Again we sing, “Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love.” For this trait Paul gave thanks. And so do we.

For Hope

Colossians 1:5, Paul adds the third thing for which he was thankful regarding his brethren in Colosse, “*For the hope which*

is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel." What is the hope of the Christian? Can we hope for external peace, contentment, satisfaction in this life, where there is no grief, pain, sorrow, disappointment? This is not what the child of God is taught to expect in following Christ. In fact, he should not consider it strange to be tried (First Timothy 3:12; First Peter 4:12-16). But we have hope. What a dreary, dreadful existence if there was no hope beyond this life! First Corinthians 15:19, *"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."*

Our hope is an eternal one. Paul called this hope the *"one hope,"* (Ephesians 4:4); a *"good hope,"* (Second Thessalonians 2:16); a *"better hope,"* (Hebrews 7:19). It is the *"anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast,"* (Hebrews 6:19). Our hope is Christ (First Timothy 1:1). Paul wrote, *"in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began."* (Titus 1:2). Of brethren he said, *"That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."*

Romans 8:24, *"For we are saved by hope..."* Why is this? Not only must we hear the gospel, believe it, repent of our sins, confess our faith in Christ, and be baptized for the remission of sins, we must live a faithful life before God (Revelation 2:10). Even though we are tried and tempted, we shall continue to run the race with patience because we are aware of the prize before us. It is our hope for the glory and joy of heaven that makes us *"keep on keeping on."* In this way our hope becomes a motivating factor in keeping us loyal to God, which is essential to salvation. If we do not remain faithful, we become like a dog turning to his vomit and a sow that was washed to the mire (Second Peter 2:20-22). Hope keeps us going onward and upward.

This hope is offered through Christ. Even though He lived and died, He arose from the dead, demonstrating Deity's power over all that would destroy and defeat us. Because of His victory, we can have victory through Him (First Corinthians 15:57). Paul was grateful that this hope did abide with his brethren. We are also thankful that this hope abides among brethren, and that it is offered to all.

All Our Blessings

How many things there are for which we can give thanks!

Consider our families, homes, friends, raiment, food, freedom, medicine, opportunity, forgiveness of sins, fellowship with God, providence, prayer, life here and in the hereafter. Can we really count our blessings since they are so numerous? Both temporal and spiritual blessings are ours. We have discussed only three that Paul specifically mentioned in the opening phrases of the book of Colossians: (1) faith, (2) love, (3) hope. There is not a Christian who is faithful in Christ who does not possess good reason to be grateful for the same things.

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His Parting Words

Acts 1:6-8, *"When they therefore were come together, they asked of him saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be my witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."*

Our lesson centers on some of the final words Jesus spoke to His apostles before ascending to heaven. Our text is the last quoted conversation He had with them, even though He spoke with them after this. Parting words are always sincere and important.

It may be a coincidence, but these last words are not unlike the tone and nature of His first recorded words, when at the age of twelve He said, *"Know ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"* (Luke 2:49). His first utterance of His personal ministry was, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."* (Matthew 4:4). In similar words He presents at the last the duty of being His witness, and shows the power by which this duty was to be accomplished.

The apostles had asked a parting question. The question reflects confidence in Jesus but also misunderstanding of the nature of His kingdom. There was a great change in these men from the time they asked this question until they started boldly

preaching the gospel. Here they inquire about the kingdom but later they proclaim its glory everywhere.

Not Yet Ready

At this time even the apostles were not yet equipped for the service they would render. Their spiritual condition was not strong. The question reflects more of a curiosity than that which is typical of one who walks by faith. They were delving into mysteries that belonged only to God. They were attempting to walk by sight rather than by faith.

Their question is temporal, dealing with time. *"Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"* Mankind often forgets eternity and thinks only in terms of time. Possibly this is because we cannot fully comprehend eternity. It is evident that the apostles had great concern for temporal affairs at this moment.

Their thinking was centered on this earth. They were talking about restoring the earthly kingdom of Israel akin to the reigns of David and Solomon. They failed to realize the kingdom was to be a spiritual one.

In one sense, it seems they revealed a personal selfishness. Were they just concerned with fleshly Israel? What of the rest of mankind? This shows they did not grasp the scope and intent of God's promise to Abraham because the blessings to spring from the "seed" of Abraham were to be for all nations.

Their question revealed misinformation and misunderstanding. They knew God wants man to come to Him, but they were not informed how God planned to bring man to Him. They seemed to be speculating how God might act rather than relying on God through faith to act as He saw fit. This question they laid before Jesus tells us more of the inadequacy of the apostles at this time than first meets the eye. In their present state they would not be able to carry out the task that would soon be given them. But the message Jesus gives them is designed to make them fit and prepared.

Correction

Christ does three things of importance. First, He corrects a false idea. As for their curiosity, He says, *"It is not for you to know."* There are some things mankind will not and cannot know, but God knows. As for their temporal thinking, He added, *"...not for you to know the times and seasons..."* of the

things God knows. If we all knew all things we could know the times of tragedy before it occurred, the date of death and the gloom that would be cast over the joys of life by such knowledge. When a doctor tells a person he has but three months to live, regardless of the joys he may experience from that time forward, they are dimmed by the knowledge of his approaching death in a relatively short and certain time.

As for their earthly thinking concerning the kingdom, Jesus promised the Holy Ghost would come upon them. As He has promised earlier, this would enable them to speak the complete truth, and recall what Jesus had taught them (John 14,15,16). The Lord's kingdom is spiritual, not earthly, in nature (John 18:36). It is not just another political power. When they were more attune to the spiritual nature of the kingdom they would have better understanding.

As for their selfishness, Jesus advised, "*Ye shall be my witnesses.*" They would not only preach to their own fellow countrymen, but to people of the whole world. At this time the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans and Gentiles. But soon they would be brethren in the Lord. By these corrections, Jesus brought them into a purer understanding of their mission as well as His. He expelled their error and confusion.

Completion

The second thing He does is to complete them. "*But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.*" He promises them power. This they would need especially seeing their weak condition. Even though they had been with Jesus for nearly three and one half years, they were still in need. With this power Jesus promised they would be equipped to tackle and expedite their work.

Commission

Having corrected them and completed them with promise, He commissions them. "*Ye shall be my witnesses...*" The great commission is also stated in Mark 16:15,16, and Matthew 28:18-20. It is similar to Paul's parting message to Timothy, "*Preach the word.*" (Second Timothy 4:2). What Jesus was saying to His apostles was that they must go and tell people of Him and His will.

By correcting, completing and commissioning His apostles,

the basic needs for carrying out their duty were provided. In a similar thought, all Christians have these needs in being faithful Christians and doing their Christian duties. We need purity, power and purpose. We now turn our attention to these needs, in reverse order.

It should be evident to all that those in the kingdom of God have a mission. The question is, "Are we practicing it and doing it?" We are not "*witnesses*" as were the apostles. But we do have the duty to preach and teach the testimony of these inspired men who were witnesses. To witness is to tell what we have seen and heard. We have not seen and heard as did they. Nor are we directly guided by the Holy Spirit as were they as inspired men. But we have learned the truth of Christ from the Word of Scripture, and we are to preach the Word to all the world because only the gospel can save (Romans 1:16). No Christian is doing his full duty who is not busy informing others of the truth. There are many avenues and methods open to us all to teach the will of Christ to others.

What We Need

To do our task we need power. The work of the church demands human energy, resourcefulness and intelligence. But we do not suggest that we shall succeed without the help from God. We have the Lord's promise of His presence and He is mindful of our efforts. We, like Paul, must sow the seed, and like Apollos, water the plant, and depend on God for the increase. We should not expect the baptism of the Holy Spirit since the Lord only promised that to the apostles. It was never promised nor intended for every Christian. But we have the power of the gospel and the power of prayer, plus mental and physical power to be about the Father's business.

We must also have purity. We must remove sin from our lives. We must know the truth and live accordingly. Hebrews 12:1 admonishes us to "*lay aside every weight and the sin that doth so easily beset us*" and run the race as a Christian with determination and faithfulness.

We have been purified by obedience to the truth (First Peter 1:22), and as we "*walk in the light as he is in the light,*" (First John 1:7), His blood will keep on keeping us clean.

In a very real sense the parting words of Jesus to His apostles were parting words to all of His disciples in principle. As Christians we have the opportunity to rise to the highest level of

spiritual attainment by being a proclaimer of Christ. Christ purifies by correcting our faults. He completes us, having furnished the power of God unto salvation, the gospel. He commissions us, having given us the mission and purpose to tell the world of the Savior God sent into this world.

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The Seven Sayings Of The Cross

Shakespeare wrote, "The tongues of dying men enforce attention like deep harmony. Where words are scarce they are seldom spent in vain. They breathe truth that breathe their words in pain."

This experience in the history of mankind has often been demonstrated to be true. Few words are dearer to a person than the final utterances that fall from the lips of those whom they love. The words of Jesus Christ as He was dying on the cross are precious to those that put their faith in Him as God's Son and man's Savior.

Jesus spoke seven times as He was hanging on the cross. Each of them are priceless revelations as to what was in His mind during those torturous hours. Each tells us more of His character. We cannot be certain as to the order in which these things were stated because all seven are not found in any one account of His life on earth and His death on the cross. But knowing the order is of no major consequence except for one or two of them.

Forgive

Few phrases are more familiar than, "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*" (Luke 23:34). He speaks as a great High Priest on behalf of sinful mankind, specifically for those who were carrying out His execution and those who caused it. He was making intercession for His enemies that pursued Him until He died. The actions and ravings of hatred had been committed against Him by the Pharisees, priests, scribes, the rabble of Jerusalem and even one of His own

chosen number. Their prejudices, born of ignorance and conceit, had taken Him to Calvary. Their mockery resounded to the heavens. These poor, deluded mockers, unknowing of the significance of their merciless actions, were actually fulfilling prophecies that provided additional evidence to the truthfulness of His claim that He was the Son of God, the very truth that His enemies sought to deny. That His enemies helped to prove His identity is one of the several ironies of the cross.

But we marvel at the compassion of Jesus in this trying hour, that of being mindful of the sins of others and the desire that they might be forgiven. Can there be any doubt in the mind of anyone that forgiveness, the willingness to forgive even the worst of enemies, is Christlike? He was too noble and pure to hold grudges and hatred in His heart. He had taught His disciples to pray, *"Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors."* (Matthew 6:12). Now He was demonstrating His teaching in perfection. The very essence of the Christian faith is embodied in His words. Forgiveness was the theme of His mission to this earth. We can only be saved by being forgiven of our iniquities and sins.

The expression reflects the attitude of Jesus. We are not to think that Jesus was seeking their forgiveness without them meeting the conditions of forgiveness. He was not praying that they be forgiven *IN* their sins, but *FROM* their sins. Prayer for forgiveness, when the offender is impenitent, will not accomplish anything except an expression of willingness by the offended to forgive. Jesus' prayer was that they might repent of their sins and know forgiveness. He wanted them to do the things necessary for forgiveness. Even though one may want to forgive another, and is willing to forgive, even as was Christ willing to forgive, forgiveness will not become a reality until the one needing forgiveness meets the divinely-given conditions for forgiveness.

Paradise

"Today thou shalt be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43). This was said to the penitent thief who was also dying on another nearby cross. The thief had asked to be remembered by the Lord when He came into His kingdom. While the other thief continued to rail against Jesus, words of hope were extended to the penitent one.

These words of Jesus have been unmercifully distorted by

religionists to attempt to prove the very opposite of what the Bible teaches about the soul of man. They have been wrested into a weapon against God's plan of salvation.

Some have taken these words to teach that one does not have to be baptized to be saved. The truth is that baptism for the remission of sins in the name of Jesus Christ had not been commanded of anybody at the time these words were spoken. That was first taught on the first Pentecost after His ascension into heaven.

During His personal ministry on earth Jesus often spoke people's sins forgiven. But we live subject to His will, which did not take effect until after His death, burial, resurrection and ascension, followed by the coming of the Holy Spirit on the apostles on Pentecost. What Jesus said to the thief has no bearing on what people must do now, under His will, to be saved. The thief lived and died before the will of Christ was operative. What fallacy to cite the thief as an example of the way to be saved today!

Nonetheless, the thief could be comforted and rejoice because Christ granted to him an assurance that all would be well with him after death. Paradise is a part of Hades, the unseen state of the dead. Jesus went to Paradise, according to His words to the thief. Peter said He went to Hades (Acts 2:27,31). In the King James Versions the words "hades" is translated by the English word "hell," which is not an incorrect translation, but does not distinguish "hades," the unseen state of the dead, from "gehenna," which is also translated "hell" and means the eternal place of punishment. Jesus went to the Paradise part of the unseen state of the dead, and assured the thief he would be there also. It is interesting to note that most modern dictionaries define hell both ways, as the state of the dead and also the place of eternal punishment. Context determines which is which. The American Standard Version makes the distinction clearer on this word.

Son And Mother

"Woman, behold thy son. Behold, thy mother." (John 19:26). Most likely these words were spoken to Mary, His mother, and John at the same utterance. We conclude it was John because it was a custom for a writer to identify himself in an anonymous manner, which in this case was John. It reflected the Lord's love, care and concern for His mother after His

departure.

What a great lesson on respect for parents! Mary was certainly undergoing great suffering when she saw her Son so cruelly mistreated. She sees His suffering brow, and blood dropping from His body. She could see and hear the soldiers casting lots for His garments. What mother would not be pained under such circumstances!

Yet, she is comforted by the words of her thoughtful Son that show His concern for her. This must have been a rewarding time for Mary in the Lord's display of His love. These were additional words that she could store in her heart as she had done with so many of the words and deeds of Jesus since His youth.

The love of this mother and Son was great. What parent would not desire such love from their children! Who would not cherish their thoughts for parental welfare! When children show concern for parents they are in the imitation of Christ. It is a lesson sorely needed among us today. So many are content to display contempt, disrespect, ingratitude and dishonor for the very ones God says are to be honored.

Thirst

Jesus also said, "*I thirst*," the shortest of His comments and one that revealed His physical agony and feelings of distress. We are told that the agony of thirst is often the most painful. It is true that when one is injured, or is suffering, that water is greatly desired to relieve the agony.

While we remember that Christ was Deity, let us not forget that He was Deity in the flesh because He took on the form of man. This cry was the human side of the Lord wailing in discomfort. He had undergone so much abuse already. He only is asking for a bit of relief for His weary flesh. But even this was denied Him by His tormentors. Instead of water He was offered a sponge dipped in vinegar, bitter and repulsive, though it mattered little at this stage of His torture. He was soon to depart this life.

His Cry!

But His bodily grief cannot be compared with the grief of His spirit. As a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, the suffering Son and Savior cried out, "*Eloi, Eloi, Lama Sabachthani*." This meant, "*My God! My God! Why hast thou*

forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

Were these the words of a triumphant King? Was this the voice of a victorious Messiah? How the infidel has gloated in his misappropriation of this phrase! They claim this is proof that even Jesus now recognized that His claim of being the Messiah was fraudulent, and even if He had sincerely believed it earlier, He now becomes aware that He was not who He claimed to be. Is this the meaning of what Jesus said? We deny there is any such suggestion in these words.

It is unthinkable that God the Father would be displeased with His Son in His hour of complete submission and accomplishment of His mission. The events of the resurrection and ascension disprove any notion that He was alienated from His Father. If Calvary raises any doubts about that, the resurrection morn melts them into oblivion.

The most feasible explanation of the passage to my mind is that Jesus had reference to Psalm 22:1, a prophetic psalm about the suffering of the Lord's anointed. Verses 7,8,16-18, *"All they that see men laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him... For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture."* The words that Jesus spoke were quotations of the opening words of this Messianic psalm. Rather than being words that suggest the Father rejected Him, they are words affirming again that He was the One of whom the psalmist wrote in prophecy. He fulfilled the psalm. He was the One He claimed to be.

The Accomplishment

As the end drew near Jesus said, *"It is finished."* (John 19:30). What was finished? Several things were finished at this event on Calvary. His life, His work of redemption, the hopelessness of mankind, payment for sins, and the law of God through Moses that was nailed to the cross, (Colossians 2:14), were all finished. Just what Jesus had in mind we cannot specifically tell, but all of these things could have been included.

To The Father

Finally, He said, "*Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*" (Luke 23:46). This should remove any question about the relationship of Jesus and the Father when Jesus was on the cross.

It was a reaffirmation that even though the body dies, the spirit lives. There is existence after physical death. The spirit returns to the Father who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

As this ordeal comes to a close, as He takes His last breath, and the last drop of life departs, He commends Himself into the care of the Almighty. While the thieves continued to hang longer, and their bones were eventually broken to hasten their death, He gave up the ghost. It was noonday.

At that moment the sun was darkened, the earth did quake, tombs were later opened, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from top to bottom, another indication of the end of the law of Moses and the Judaistic system. The Savior of mankind, the Son of God, was dead. A centurion summarized it properly, "*Truly, this was the Son of God.*" (Matthew 27:54).

To meditate upon these final phrases of Jesus enhances our love, respect and awe of Him as the Christ, God's Son. But as important as were these last seven sayings on the cross, they were not the last He spoke on earth. After three days He came from the tomb, and for forty days instructed His apostles concerning the kingdom, the church. He made many appearances before those who could identify Him as the One, who though once dead, was now alive.

The Charge

Before ascending into heaven He gave words of hope, promise, obligation and duty. "*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. Amen.*" (Matthew 28:19,20). "*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.*" (Mark 16:15,16). These were among His last words and they teach us how to be saved, even those of us living today. Those who hear and obey shall be saved. Those who don't, won't.

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Cleansing The Temple

Would you read from your Bible John 2:13-22. This is the record of one of two occasions when Jesus cleansed the temple. (See also Matthew 21). Our text refers to the earlier event while Matthew records a similar action toward the end of His ministry.

The temple was the center of Jewish worship, the house of God and a sacred place. The first temple was built by Solomon, the second by Zerubbabel, and the third by Herod. It was Herod's temple that stood during the time of Jesus. When Jesus cleansed the temple the second time, He said, "*My house shall be called a house of prayer.*" (Matthew 21:13, a quotation from Isaiah 56:7). Here He accused the people of making it a house of merchandise. Later He said they turned it into a den of robbers, which not only indicated using it for business practices, but unfair practices at that. Misusing the place was serious enough, but to exploit and take advantage of others was error atop error. The cleansing of the temple was a protest against the desecration of that which was holy.

The temple was a material building. The temple of God today is composed of people, Christians, living stones, the church (Ephesians 2:21,22; First Peter 2:5). If the material house was not to be misused, how much more ought the spiritual house not be misused. We ought to put forth every effort to prevent the desecration of the bodies and hearts of Christians because they belong to God (First Corinthians 3:16; 6:19).

His Example

Jesus went to the temple at Passover time. He lived under the law of Moses and kept the Passover faithfully. It was His custom to worship, often taking part in Scripture study when visiting various synagogues. This is a valuable example that we ought to appreciate and emulate. We are not to forsake assembling ourselves together (Hebrews 10:25), and when we do this we are doing far worse than just "missing church." We miss blessings; we fail to worship; we disobey God. What could be more serious? What could be a worse example?

When Christ arrived, verse 14 tells us what He found. People were selling animals and birds that would be used for sacrifice. This availability of animals was convenient for worshippers, and

no fault is found in the mere selling of them. They were obviously demanding too much for them, and they were called robbers. Others were doubtless exchanging foreign money into Jewish shekels at an unfair rate. The Jewish shekel was what was needed to pay tribute in the temple. What they were doing was not evil in itself, except for the dishonesty and the wrong use of the temple area. Outside in the temple grounds would have been a more acceptable place for this assistance that was being offered to the worshippers.

When Jesus saw what was being done He set about to correct it. It is always right to correct what is wrong. Some are so hesitant to oppose error that they leave the impression the error is permissible and acceptable. While we must oppose wrong the right way, we must oppose wrong. When some are prone to criticize those who oppose the manner some use to oppose error, we are inclined to appreciate the phrase that says, "I like the way I am doing it better than the way you are not doing it."

His Action

Jesus made a scourge out of cords and drove the animals out of the temple area. He overturned the tables of the money changers. He told them all to get out of the temple. Our Lord acted very aggressively. Some say that this is an example and permission to use physical force in religion. Some claim that right today. Some religions physically persecute others who do not agree with them. History reveals devastating horrors that have occurred in the name of religion, even called a defense of Christianity. Some religions, like Mohammedanism, Roman Catholicism, and some pagan religions of the Far East have never renounced this right but insist they can do as they wish in the use of physical violence to promote and defend their faith. But the actions taken here of a physical nature were not taken against the persons and their bodies, but the animals and tables. One can never prove that Jesus laid a stripe on any person. That is not the nature of the Christian faith (Second Corinthians 10:4). Christ would not have done something contradictory to what He inspired His apostles to teach regarding the defense of the truth.

Why did Jesus use this method? The temple was His because He was God in the flesh. It was His right to do as He wanted with what was His. He acted as Deity. No man can assume such a position unless Deity has granted that authority. His house, the

church, is not ours. It belongs to Him. We have no authority to advance the church in such a physically violent fashion. Furthermore, He lived under the Mosaic law where on certain occasions God allowed and used physical force to carry out His will. We do not live under that law. Christ, as God, was well within His rights and priorities. He could even speak sins forgiven as well. The way we can bring people into conformity to the truth is by teaching, persuasion, example and creating convictions in their hearts. *"Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men..."* (Second Corinthians 5:11). It is significant that the temple of God no longer is a material temple that enemies can desecrate, but the temple is a spiritual house.

The action of Jesus was one of great zeal. His disciples recalled a prophecy from Psalm 69:9, *"Zeal for thy house shall eat me up."* Christ was much "eaten up" with determination, and was exercising enthusiasm for the truth, an intense ardor to uphold what was right. Christians today could stand a good dose of similar zeal. Paul says we are to be a zealous people of good works (Titus 2:14). What Jesus did sprang from a zeal for that which was right before the Father.

His Sign

Jesus, appearing in the temple as a reformer, meant He claimed to be divine, the Messiah. He assumed authority that only belonged to Deity. Therefore, they asked of Him a sign to justify His actions. *"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."* (John 2:19).

His hearers misunderstood Him, thinking that He spoke of the physical temple that stood before them that He had just purged. That temple was forty-six years under construction. What He proposed sounded impossible to them. To destroy the temple was tantamount to blasphemy anyway. Later, at His trial, His enemies used this misappropriated statement as evidence of His blasphemy against the temple. Strange how people who abused the temple were so ready to accuse another of blaspheming it.

Jesus was referring to the temple of His body. The sign was that He would be slain, but raised again the third day. That would confirm His authority. He was foretelling His death, burial and resurrection. His opponents made the error of taking what He said without regard to the intent and meaning of it. This is often done even yet to the teaching of Christ. It is deplorable for people to be guilty of ignoring the meaning a speaker places on

what he says. By twisting and wresting words men can appear to make people say what they never have said nor meant. That Jesus was done this way is to the discredit of His hearers. If people did the Lord that way, it is probable that people today will not be immune from such treatment.

But His disciples heard these words, also, and after His resurrection they recalled them. The truth was dormant for a while until it became evident. Truth sometimes lies unattended for long periods before it penetrates. People have heard gospel sermons and the seed is sown, but they refuse to obey until much, much later. It is tragic that time is wasted and the soul is endangered by such postponement, but the wonderful thing about the truth, it will save whenever people will hear and heed. Truth will accomplish its purposes, either to save or to separate.

He Cleanses Yet

Just as Jesus cleansed the temple, more importantly, He can and will cleanse the heart of all who are washed in His blood. Paul's sins were washed away when he was baptized (Acts 22:16). In baptism we reach the saving blood of Christ (Romans 6:3,4). The water is not the agent that cleans, but the blood of the Lord. But it is when we are baptized in water that God applies the blood. Have you been cleansed by Christ?

† † † † †

(continued from page 6)

my mind through the years. How can people say they believe something to be true and turn right around and give their support to various forces, religiously, educationally, politically, economically and socially, that work in the opposite direction of what they contend are their convictions!

None would likely contend they have always acted consistently in every matter. But it should be expected that we try. Every action ought be finally decided on what is consistent with Biblical truth. Evidently, with many, convictions must not be very deep. I just do not understand it. JB

Witchhunters

It is not the characteristic of false teachers to always be the loving, kindly and gentle folk that they like to present themselves to be. Some of the rudest, most vicious and venomous words uttered by anyone come from the mouths and pens of those who would have others believe they are so charitable and nice. They are usually very judgmental, especially against those they condemn for making judgments. Name-calling has become one of their trademarks. One that we sometimes hear is the label of "witchhunter" applied to anyone who would speak out against false doctrines and warn of false teachers.



JAMES W. BOYD

Of course, the term is not meant to be complimentary but derogatory. It impugns the motives of those who love sound doctrine and depicts him as one who only seeks to find fault in others. It assumes that those who love truth consider everyone else to be witches. Nobody likes witches, do they? Who would approve of witches? Should not witches be identified and warnings be given concerning them?

It seems to me that the only ones who need be afraid of a "witch-hunter" is a witch. Sound teachers need have no concern, nor do they.

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