

*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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# ***Unrequited Love***

Unrequited love is love given to another but is not returned. It is a heartbreaking experience to love someone dearly and not be loved by that person. Yet, unrequited love is a tragedy and sadness that runs throughout the history of mankind. It is often mentioned in songs, plays, stories, poems and other means of expression. But the cases of unrequited love are real and frequent. We cite a few examples.

We are told that after Napoleon reached the threshold of glory and power that he forsook the woman who had helped him, entered a marriage that he thought was politically expedient for his continued expansion and growth of power, and abandoned his former love.

Tom Mooney, who was sent to prison in 1916 after being convicted of a dynamiting incident, was eventually released because of the efforts of his wife that spanned over thirty years of persistence, persuasion, seeing all the influential people she could, working, and spending all she could get to bring about his release. Yet, within a year after he went free he left her and married another woman.

There is the story of the widowed mother who sent her son through college by sacrificing, scrubbing floors, taking in washing, working long and late hours to finance his education. At his graduation the son was ashamed of her shabby dress, which did not measure up to that worn by the parents of his classmates, and after receiving his diploma he did not seek her out, but slipped away with the others for a celebration, leaving her to go back home alone, and without even a word of gratitude.

Possibly similar incidents have occurred over and over in human relationships. Unrequited love is one of the sorriest chapters of human conduct, and one of life's greatest disappointments. Possibly each reader has suffered something like this from those you respected, loved, wanted to help, had helped, but were treated with contempt thereafter.

## **Biblical Theme**

This theme is found repeatedly in the Word of God. One of the more impressive stories of this nature is found in the book of

Hosea. Hosea was a prophet of God, writer of the book by that name, which is listed among the Minor Prophets. He was not a “minor” prophet because his message was less important, however.

Hosea lived around seven hundred fifty years before Christ. His life unfolds as a story that has the power to grip the heart of any person who has the capacity of compassion, sympathy and sensitivity.

Hosea married a woman named Gomer. Gomer became unfaithful to her righteous husband. Going into a life of adultery, she left her husband and three children and went after her illicit relationships. She became so degraded that eventually no one wanted her and none had any respect for her. After a time she was placed on the slave market to be sold as a slave. The moving part of the record is that her husband was the one who bought her. Hosea 3:2,3, *“So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley: and I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so I will also be for thee.”*

The reason this story of Hosea is so outstanding is because he was not just telling his own story and how his love for Gomer was not returned. He was telling God’s story and the relationship between God and Israel. Israel had behaved much like Gomer. God uses this account to say, “This is the way my people have been toward me.”

The first three of the fourteen chapters of Hosea tell the story of Hosea’s life. The last eleven chapters present the parallel of that life’s story in the God-Israel relationship.

### **Unfaithful Israel**

Israel had been unfaithful to God just as Gomer had been unfaithful to Hosea. Here is how God describes Israel. Hosea 4:1,2, *“Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel: for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, no mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood.”* Verse six, *“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.”* Hosea 8:7, *“For they have sown*

*the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind..." From Hosea 7:8-11, "Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned. Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, ye he knoweth not. And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face: and they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him for all this. Ephraim is also like a silly dove without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria." As Gomer had gone from one to another rather than the one who loved her, so Israel had turned to the neighboring nations rather than to God. Verse 14, "And they have not cried unto me with their heart..."*

### **God Still Loved**

But as in the case of Hosea and Gomer, God still loved Israel, even though Israel was not worthy of that love. Hosea 11:4,7, *"When Israel was a child then I loved him and called my son out of Egypt. As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images. I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them... And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him."* When Gomer reached such a degraded state, there was none who provided for her. But Hosea made provision for her, even when she was not aware of it. So it had been between God and Israel. But the sad part of all this is the fact that God's love went unreturned.

Are we like Gomer and Israel? Here is the real significance of this historical account of human tragedy and spiritual application. It seems that even in our age that there is a great amount of unrequited love. It is not only a matter between married partners that we speak, although that is the case so often in our divorce-ridden society. But it is the lack of love for God from a nation and individuals who have been so bountifully blessed by the God of heaven. Far too often the history of God's dealings with mankind has been a one-way street. God pours out His love on mankind, but mankind has not returned that love.

In the Garden of Eden this was the same story. Did not Adam and Eve fail to respond properly to the many manifestations of God's love?

Down through the accounts of the Old Testament the same story is repeated, as the Bible student well knows. Not only was it the case with Israel but with many individuals as well.

When we come to the New Testament, do we not find more of the same thing? Do we not see the brutal rejection of God's Son? Did not people rise in anger against those who preached to them the message of salvation they needed to hear?

### **In Our Time**

That story continues to our day. It is often written by people such as we are, who will not live as God requires but are content and determined to "do their own thing" and follow their own will. Even among some who profess to be followers of Christ we see that when decisions have to be made between this world and the way of the Lord that this world is often loved far more than God. How often have each of us been guilty of receiving the benefits and mercies and love poured upon us from the Almighty but have withheld our devotion and service unto Him? Let each one examine his own life!

The appeal of this lesson for each of us is that we make our religion deeper, more sincere, more practical and more meaningful. Our relationship to God is something that should concern us, not just during periods of formal worship when we assemble with the saints, but in the day-to-day manner of life. It is not uncommon for many to not even give the Lord service in worship more than once per week, and not even with regularity then. Vacant chairs during Bible study, Sunday evening worship hours, mid-week services, gospel meetings, and other times indicate that we are willing for God to love us, but He should not expect very much from us to show love in return.

We wonder how we manage to sing, "I gave my life for thee, what hast thou given to me?" and then continue in the same negligent, half-hearted way that we sometimes go about being a Christian in word and deed!

### **The Prodigal**

The record of Luke fifteen fits this theme perfectly and completely. The son left home in his determined and self-willed fashion. We call him "prodigal" because he wasted his substance in riotous living. While we see the shame of the son, let us not fail to see the love of the generous and forgiving father. The

reason this story has a happy ending is because of the father, not just because the son *"came to himself."* Thankfully, the son returned home. But what did he find upon reaching home? There was his father, looking, waiting, longing, loving, rejoicing that his son, once lost, was home again.

Has not God shown His love toward us sufficiently? Did He not send Jesus Christ to provide for our salvation, even when we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8,9)? Did not Christ die the cruel death of Calvary for each of us (First John 2:2)? What more could be done to manifest love toward us than what God has already done?

But have we returned that love? Can we live at peace with ourselves knowing that we are withholding from God what He deserves? Should it not be my prayers and your prayer that since God first love us, we should love Him (First John 4:10,19)? *"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins... We love him, because he first loved us."*

The way we return God's love is by obedience to His will. First John 5:3, *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous."*

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## ***Worshipping Worthily***

John 4:24, *"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."*

First Corinthians 11:26-30, *"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."*

These passages introduce our study. Notice several points made in them. (1) Man is to worship God. (2) His worship is to be in truth, which means according to God's Word. *"Thy word is truth."* (John 17:17). (3) He is to worship in spirit. This has reference to his attitude, understanding, disposition motive and

intent in worship. (4) Observing the Lord's Supper is one way to worship, pay homage and respect to the divine God of heaven. (5) The Supper is not to be observed "*unworthily*," which means in an unworthy manner. This has to do with our attitude and heart in worship. It has nothing whatever to do with our worthiness of that which the Supper signifies, or even the Supper itself. (6) Obviously, if one can worship "*unworthily*," he can also worship worthily. Acceptable worship must be offered worthily. Hebrews 13:15, "*By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name.*" Peter teaches we are "*to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.*"

### **Why Assemble?**

Hebrews 10:25 is the often cited passage that commands us to assemble. But why are we to assemble? If the heart of every one was made known we might discover a wide variety of motives some have for assembling. Let us not judge the heart of another, however. But there are many possible, even probable, reasons people have for assembling which we can determine over years of experience, expressions, comments and admissions of people.

"Attending church" has been used as a showcase to display new clothes, a new car, or something somebody wants everybody to see and notice. Especially does this seem to become evident at "Easter" when new outfits are in abundance. There is nothing wrong per se with new clothes, a new car, or other things we obtain. We suppose it is better to be present even with these misfit motives than not to be present at all. Possibly by being present some truth may be learned that would change the wrong motive to a correct one. But attendance at the assembly with such intent is to badly miss the mark.

Some may come just to please someone else, such as the wife or husband, parents, children or friends. It is commendable to want to please others. Again, it is probably better to come for that reason than to be absent. But there must be a higher motive than this before God is pleased.

Could it be that some are present because they feel obligated and bound by duty? It is true that worship is a "must." Doing one's duty is commendable as far as it goes. But is there nothing nobler in worshipping God than simply doing a duty, one that we might wish we could avoid but feel too obligated to attempt

to abandon going through the motions as if discharging the duty? To worship with this kind of heart stems more from fear of hell than love for God.

### **“Get To” Verses “Got To”**

Worship, rightly considered, is one of life's rare and precious moments. We should **want** to be present for worship. We should have the “get to” attitude rather than a “have to” attitude. The difference in the number present on Sunday morning contrasted with Sunday evening could well indicate who has which attitude. Attendance just to soothe our consciences is not really giving God the praise that worship is designed to offer.

Some may come out of curiosity, just to see what goes on, what is said, and who is there. Visitors may have this as an original intent and we would not be surprised at that. It is good to be present, but growth and more information should change that into something better and nobler.

It is possible that some people use the worship periods as an opportunity to just see friends, socialize, converse, see and be seen. In our hurry-scurry world the paths of people who know each other too seldom cross. Fellowship and Christian association should be encouraged. It is encouraging to see and hear brethren greeting and talking to each other and showing a personal concern for each other. But this is not the best reason for not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. This is at best a good by-product.

Those who are not Christians may be present in order to observe, investigate, inquire, and seek opportunity for further study. We would encourage non-Christians to do this with regularity because they can learn much by seeing and hearing what transpires. With an open mind and an open Bible their investigative attitude can bring them to conversion to Christ.

Possibly you can think of other similar motives why people are present at the worship hours. But for the true and faithful Christian who follows the New Testament the primary reason, first and foremost, is to worship God. Nothing surpasses this motive and nothing can be allowed to challenge it. Unless this is the intent of the heart our worship cannot be offered worthily.

Do we really worship once we are gathered together? Assuming we have the proper attitude, is our worship what God expects and directs? What do we see and do when we proceed

through the actions of the worship period?

### **Acts Of Worship**

We sing songs of praise. There is no instrumental music involved because God has specified the kind of music to be offered and has not authorized the use of mechanical instruments of music. This is reason enough to confine the music to singing. In every instance in the New Testament where God's Word speaks of music in worship it is always singing. There is no Biblical authority to do otherwise. With the determination to " *speak as the oracles of God,*" (First Peter 4:11), we sing.

We pray to God, recognizing our dependence on Him, honoring Him as the giver of every perfect and good gift, the source of blessings, thanking Him and making our petitions known. We do not pray because God needs to be informed what we need, but because we can show we lean on Him for our needs. In this way, praying through Christ, we worship Deity.

We study God's Word, magnifying it as the sole authority in matters of religion and service before God. We teach His precepts that are to be followed in daily living. We honor His laws and proclaim His truths. We are builded up in the most holy faith and the weak are made strong, the strong are made stronger, the sinful are called to repentance, the lost are called by the gospel to be saved.

We contribute of our material means to the special use for the advancement of the cause of Christ. We honor Him with our substance (Proverbs 3:9). Realizing that we are but temporary stewards and all that is in our charge belongs to our Master, we offer its use to the furtherance of His purpose. By our giving we have a measure of our love for the Lord. If those who worship God will not support the work of God, who will?

We partake of the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Christ each first day of the week as Scripture authorizes. In this way we proclaim the Lord's sacrifice until He returns. We partake of the emblems of His body and blood as a memorial to Him. These actions are those which are taught in Scripture in New Testament worship. They are simple, yet profound. We do these things according to His Word, which is to worship "*in truth,*" which is what John 4:24 instructs.

### **Worthily**

But do we worship worthily? Let each examine his own heart as Paul has admonished. What of the worship in song? Can it be done worthily if done listlessly, half-heartedly, as if it pains us? Do you even sing at all? Some do not. Nobody can perform this act of worship for you. Every individual is expected to participate to the fullest of his or her capacity. Singing should ring with fervor, enthusiasm, confidence and from the heart overflowing with love and praise for Deity. There is no excuse for a congregation to be content with singing that degrades and lacks the spiritual luster it ought to have.

What of the worship in prayer? You may not lead the prayer, and women should not. But do you pray as you are led in prayer? Prayer is our channel to God, and what a privilege and favor God has afforded us to provide this channel of approach before His throne. It is not just an exercise of mechanical phrases and meaningless expressions. Even though similar wording may occur with each prayer, the prayer should be from the heart. Our very soul should be involved.

When God's Word is presented, do you hear in view of eternity? We must realize that we shall be judged by His Word (John 12:48). It is to our advantage to give respect to the presentation of it. Where is your attention during the lessons? Are you thinking of irrelevant, mundane, and even contradictory matters? Or is your center of attention on the spiritual truth being offered? As much as is physically and mentally possible, we should concentrate on the Word simply because it is God's Word that is being taught. We should do this regardless of the ability, or lack of it, of the one who is presenting it.

Brethren, how do you give? The question is not how much do you give? That is between you and God. But how do you give. This is also between you and God. Do you give liberally, cheerfully, as you have been prospered and as you have planned or purposed? Is it something you do grudgingly, because you feel it is necessary, but wish you could avoid it? Do we give of our firstfruits or does God's cause get the "leftovers" after we have done everything else we prefer to do? When we give worthily we are laying up treasures in heaven.

How do you observe the Lord's Supper? There is a severe warning in First Corinthians 11:29 if the Supper is partaken "unworthily." During the observance is no time for idle conversation, flighty thoughts, any sort of distracting and irreverent conduct. It is a very thoughtful moment and a solemn event. Thinking where you are going to eat dinner, where you

plan to go or have been, what you plan to do, is to wander from the intent of the Lord's Supper. In Corinth some were "sickly" because they did not partake of the Lord's Supper worthily.

These matters are of the utmost seriousness to the spiritual welfare of our souls. We speak of things of supreme importance. God takes note of our worship. Let us strive to please Him and we shall be blessed eternally.

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## ***Better, Yet Lower, Than Angels***

Hebrews 1:1-8, "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; who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers as flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom."

Hebrews 2:6-10, "But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visiteth him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownest him with glory and honor, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death,

*crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste of death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering."*

### **Not Contradictions**

In these two passages are statements that at first glance may seem to be contradictory. Christ is said to be "*better than the angels,*" but then it is stated that He was made "*lower than the angels.*" What does this mean and why is this revelation so important to us and to the world?

We must understand the general purpose of the book of Hebrews. It was written to Jewish people who had been converted to Christ but were in danger of falling away. The epistle was written to prevent apostasy. This in itself is sufficient to show the fallacy of the false doctrine that once one has been saved he cannot fall away. But the book primarily is written to show why Christians should not fall away. The reason is because of the superiority of Christ over all before or after Him. To show this superiority the writer shows Jesus superior to several things that were sacred to Jewish people, such as the law given through Moses, animal sacrifices, the Levitical priesthood and angels.

The book opens with the reminder how God speaks to us. In former times God spoke through prophets, dreams, visions and a variety of ways. The Jews respected and cherished the divine messages given. But now God has another authority that supplants them all and is superior to them all. Now God speaks through His Son, Jesus Christ. This is the meaning of the confession made by the Father in Matthew 17:5, "*This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased, hear ye him.*" This confession and instruction was given in the presence of Moses, the great lawgiver for Israel, and ELijah, one of God's outstanding prophets during the age of the Mosaic Law.

### **The Authority**

The importance of a message depends to a great extent on the authority of the messenger. If an ordinary citizen of our land should say that the nation would be at war within the week, this would not cause much concern. But if the President of the

United States made such a statement it would alarm the entire world. The authority behind the message of the Word of God is Jesus Christ. The message is important because of Him. What is it about Jesus Christ that makes Him so important?

Hebrews chapter one teaches He is "*heir of all things.*" He is the Son of God. Through Him the worlds have been made, therefore, He is Creator. This necessitates His eternal nature and Deity. He is the "*brightness of the glory of God,*" even being called God. Not only is He the Creator but the Sustainer because by His power all things are sustained. He possesses the highest rank, being on the right hand of God, which means He has assumed the position on the throne (Acts 2:30,34). He is higher, greater and better than angels.

Of what significance would this be to the Jewish Christians? They believed in the reality of angels and God's use of them, except for the Saducees. An angel is a messenger, and in this chapter the angels under consideration are God's angels. Both the Old and New Testaments reveal that God has used angels in various ways to accomplish His purposes. Let us consider some of these incidents.

Angels came to tell Abraham of the forthcoming birth of Isaac. Angels were used to warn Lot of the coming destruction of Sodom. Daniel showed angels presiding over the courts of princes. An angel smote Herod as he claimed deity for himself. God's prophets were often cared for by angels, and once were used for the release of Peter from prison. Angels could have been used to protect Christ at the time He was seized by His enemies if that had been the will of the Lord. Angels were used to frustrate the devil's aims regarding the body of Moses. They announced the birth of Christ, as well as the birth of John the Baptist before Him. They have been used to help God's people against their enemies. We are told that over two hundred references mention God's use of angels. The Lord will return in the company of angels. These are but a few of the Biblical references to angels that would cause any person who respects the Bible to believe in their existence. The Jews did believe in them. Therefore, one who was better, higher, greater than all angels would have to be one of high authority and deserving of reverence and glory.

### **He Is Better...**

In what way is Christ greater and better than angels? Verse

four says He has inherited a more excellent name. No angels were ever called the Son of God. Angels worshipped Him, and the lesser worships the greater, not the other way around. Angels ministered to Christ following His temptation by Satan (Matthew 4). We even read where angels have been cast down and await punishment (Second Peter 2:4), but never so with Christ. The enemies of Christ are the ones that shall be cast down. All of these things give evidence to Christ being greater and better than angels.

### **...Yet Lower**

In what sense is Christ lower than angels? Psalm 8:4,5, "*What is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor.*" This is the Scripture mentioned by the Hebrew writer in Hebrews 2. God created man, but obviously created him lower than the angels. Since Christ left heaven, became a man, taking on the form and fashion as a man (Philippians 2:5-8), He, being greater, higher and better than angels, nonetheless, in human form, could be said to be lower than angels. He is not lower than angels in any sense at this present time since He has returned to the Father and rules and reigns over His spiritual kingdom from His throne in heaven (Acts 7:49). Having accomplished His mission He left the walks of humanity. But while He was God in the flesh, Emmanuel, God with us, the Word in form of man, He was lower than angels by virtue of being a human being as well as Deity.

What is the significance and importance for us to know that Jesus Christ was both better, yet lower, than angels? To know He is better and superior is to know of His Deity, authority and the gospel delivered by His authority is of utmost concern and is the authority for all mankind. He is the way and there is no other (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Seeing who He is, we can place our complete and unreserved faith and confidence in Him, giving Him our total allegiance. Being the Son of God, He is able to break the hold of sin and Satan that brings our doom and redeems us unto salvation. This is salvation from which we dare not turn back because to do so would be to leave the superior for the inferior. This the Jews needed to understand as they were being taught to return to the system under Moses by which they could not be saved. This we also need to understand as we

might be tempted to follow the ways of men rather than the way of Jesus Christ.

Since the Word spoken by angels proved steadfast, and those that disobeyed received just recompense, how much more ought we be obedient to what the Lord Jesus has delivered and directed, seeing how He is great, higher, superior and better than angels? To know Him as being better than angels is to know that this same Jesus is both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36).

## **Our Salvation**

To know that He was made lower than angels is to know how God has provided for our salvation. God sent His Son to die in our stead, "*taste of death for every man,*" (Hebrews 2:9), and be our Savior by His blood. Although He suffered on the cross of Calvary and died, He was raised from the dead, and is empowered to give eternal life to those that come to Him. Being lower than angels, He brings "*many sons to glory.*" (Hebrews 2:10). In short, being lower than angels means He died that we might live.

With Jesus being better than angels, yet lower than angels, God has shown in a manner incapable of duplication how much He loves us and desires our salvation. We should recognize and accept the authority and greatness of Christ and partake of the spiritual salvation offered us by virtue of His greatness. Better, yet lower, shows what Christ has done for us. It is a rather simplistic expression that actually embraces the essentials of God's plan to save man by His Son.

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## **Conversion**

In almost any service when the church members assemble we have people present who are not Christians. They have not yet been converted to Christ. While the worship period is for worship it is also an opportunity to teach the lost the way to be saved. We want to investigate what it means to be converted, the importance of it, and how it is accomplished. It may be an understatement to say that there is much misunderstanding in the religious world over this crucial subject. Our text will be Acts

3:19, "*Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.*" These words were spoken by the inspired apostle Peter. He had just healed the lame man that attracted considerable attention and gave him opportunity to preach the gospel. He delivered a discourse concerning Christ, emphasizing the basic facts of the gospel. Then he issues this direction of our text.

If there was no other passage in Scripture on this subject this would be sufficient emphasis on the necessity of conversion. We learn why we are to repent and be converted. It is so "*that your sins may be blotted out.*" This implies that people do sin and stand condemned because of sin. With conversion this damned condition is overcome.

Another passage that deserves consideration is Matthew 18:3, "*Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*" Entrance into the kingdom is essential for salvation. It would be difficult to present language more forcefully than this regarding the necessity of conversion. If God says you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven without conversion then nobody can devise some way to by-pass this teaching. Do not be deceived. We must either be converted or we shall not see the glorious home in heaven into which the kingdom shall be delivered (First Corinthians 15:24).

## **Two False Theories**

There are two very popular theories regarding conversion, both of which are in error. First, some consider conversion to be wholly an act of Deity, purely a transaction that is entirely left to God. This theory reduces man to a mere machine, being acted upon by no other influence than a direct action of God, man having nothing whatever to do concerning the matter. If this be true, as the Calvinistic doctrine would have people believe, then God would be under obligation to save everyone if He saves anyone lest He be partial and become a respecter of persons, the very thing Peter and Paul deny is true of Him. If this doctrine were true then anyone who is lost could blame God because it would be His failure to act. Are we to think that the God of justice, mercy, kindness, grace and truth is of such a nature as that? We should fear to take such a position that would accuse God in such fashion.

The second false theory is that the matter is altogether in

man's hands, conversion being wholly a work of man, salvation being a reward that belongs to man as if he has earned or merited it. This is just as foreign to the truth as the first false doctrine. It would be a dishonor to God to assume He does not have the power to cleanse people from sin. It would be an outright denial of many passages that teach that God saves and that He saves through Christ. This would make the grace of God nonessential and the worth of man the basic ingredient of salvation. How could anyone who knows the teaching of the Bible assume that anybody can merit salvation because of their own righteousness?

### **The Truth**

As is often the case when extreme false doctrines float about, the truth is betwixt the two. God has a hand in conversion, but man is also involved. One without the other will accomplish nothing. Paul said in First Corinthians 3:9, *"For we are laborers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building."* God and man work together. This is true once one has become a Christian and it is true in people becoming Christians.

This position is very evident in John 3:16 that shows both Deity and humanity involved in the saving of humanity. *"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."* God's part is that He loved man and graciously provided the Savior who is Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son. Christ is involved because He is the One through whom salvation is offered. Man has a part in that man must do the believing, and this belief is always an obedient faith when the New Testament speaks of faith in connection with salvation.

It is impossible for one to miss the message of our text. Repentance and being converted is man's part. The blotting out of sins is what God does. Blotting out sins is equivalent to forgiveness of sins. God and man working together bring the salvation of man into reality. This is the way God designed the way of salvation.

### **Refusal**

In Jesus' day, as now, there were those who refused to be converted. Matthew 13:15, *"For this people's heart is waxed*

*gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them."* They refused the blessings God offered. It was not that God or Christ desired their condemnation. Matthew 23:37, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"* Notice the point made that "*ye would not.*" The people would not change their minds, change their lives, change their directions, turn to God. Again, Jesus said, John 5:40, "*And ye will not come to me that ye might have life.*" They could come, but they would not come. God had done His part and Christ had done His part, but the people under consideration would not do their part. They refused heaven's call. Therefore, they remained in a condemned state. There was no other way for them to be saved except to be converted and they rejected.

### **Illustration**

The following will illustrate conversion. It is familiar illustration to many who have heard the gospel preached. Suppose a citizen of a foreign country hears of America, learns of its beauty and freedom. The testimony convinces him that being an American is desirable and he determines to become a citizen. His resolve to change citizenship must take place. He must make the decision to leave his old country, his former paths, and do whatever is necessary to become an American. He will never leave the old country until he makes up his mind to forsake the old and embrace the new. Once that decision is made he still lacks some things before he is a citizen, however. Just determining he wants to be an American does not make him an American.

He must engage in and complete the naturalization process that the laws of America prescribe. Not until he has completed these demands is he sworn in as a citizen. Should he die during the process or even the moment before being sworn into citizenship he would die an alien. But once he has finished the process he is then granted (given) his citizenship. His goal and hearts desire is accomplished.

Now the laws of America must be met and he must conform

to them. He cannot write his own ticket, his own way, but must meet the laws of the nation into which he wishes to enter.

### **Principles In Conversion**

The same principles are true in entering the kingdom of heaven. To enter, your sins must be blotted out. You hear of heaven, learn of the joys that await those who are citizens of heaven's kingdom, the testimony is convincing and you firmly believe it is true. You have the strong desire to enter. But just having the desire does not accomplish the goal.

You must decide to become a citizen of God's kingdom. God has provided the way for you to be a citizen, but you must make the decision to go God's way or not. You must renounce your allegiance to the old kingdom of sin and Satan. This is called repentance because you change your mind. But there is more ahead of you.

You must submit to God's laws of naturalization. Not until you complete the process are you among the redeemed in the kingdom. After having done what God says you must do, then God gives you the salvation He promised.

### **What Is Required**

His law requires that upon hearing the gospel you must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 8:24), repent of your sins (Luke 13:3), confess your faith in Christ (Acts 8:37; Romans 10:9,10), and be baptized into Christ for the remission (forgiveness or blotting out) of sins (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27). Then your conversion is complete and you begin your service unto God and your growth as a child of God, a new citizen in the kingdom of God.

† † † † †

## **Overcoming Racial Prejudice**

Acts 10:9-15, "*On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto a city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour. And he became very hungry and would have eaten: but while they made ready he fell*

*into a trance, and saw heaven opened and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth, wherein were all manner of four footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter, kill and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord: for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean. And the voice spake again unto him the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common."*

Our subject is very controversial and it is unlikely all will agree with what is presented here. Even though I have tried to avoid personal opinions and concentrate on facts, Scripture, and the spirit of Christ, the nature of the subject makes it difficult to disassociate oneself from the emotion of it and be totally objective. The day in which we live contributes to this.

We assume from the start that racial prejudice is something undesirable, and where it exists it should be overcome. A sense of fairness, the opposite of prejudice, and Biblical teaching lead us to this conclusion. Prejudice is a judgment-in-advance without examination. It prejudges. It is not prejudice to approve or disapprove of something or someone after adequate examination has been made and the evidence speaks. Prejudice can be understood as one defined it, "Prejudice is being down on something that you are not up on." Racial prejudice is one of the more volatile and explosive kinds of prejudice, surpassed possibly by religious prejudice. Racial prejudice is an attitude and action that is injurious and negative toward a person because of his race or color of skin.

## **Realism**

Shall we be realistic? We have racial prejudice all around us in this world, and probably within us. This is true internationally, nationally, and even among those of us in the church. What is the Christlike way to handle this problem? What does God expect of His people? Regardless of what the rest of the world says or does, or how any one of us may think or act, what must we do to please God?

Christianity was born in the midst of intense racial prejudice. It is not a product of it, but it began where it was thick and violent. No people have been more guilty of racial prejudice than the Jews and Gentiles of the first century in the land of Palestine. Some exalted themselves for no other reason than they were of a certain race, and considered others as outcasts, dogs, or

worse, and on racial grounds. This was taught, expressed, reflected in behavior, laws and in every other way.

### **Generalizations**

One prominent mark of prejudice is the willingness to generalize concerning other people. Let me illustrate. Even though every person is an individual, unlike any other, yet, in describing each other and forming attitudes toward each other we will generalize. Southerners are this way; northerners are that way. Who could dare say that all southerners are alike in everything, or all northerners are alike? College people are snobbish. The rich are money hungry and think they are better than others. The poor are lazy. Elders are holding back the church. Preachers try to run things. Women are overly emotional. Blacks are not responsible.

Right here let us consider a thought that is worth the entire study if we can learn it. What may be characteristic of even a majority of a certain group is not necessarily characteristic of every individual in that group. Whether we realize it or not, we are guilty of too many generalizations that only announces our personal prejudices.

### **Causes**

What has caused our present day racial prejudice? Certainly the past has contributed to it. Prejudice is taught, handed down by word and example from generation to generation. Run your own experiment. Children of different races can and do play peacefully with each other. The difference in color of skin does not affect their conduct toward each other. But after a few years of traditions, customs and adult examples they learn to distinguish on the basis of race. Whatever may be their race they are usually taught that those of their race are "right" and all others are either "wrong" or certainly "less right."

Behind much prejudice is the attempt to build up oneself at the expense of running the other fellow down. This occurs not only in race relations but in many areas of life. It reveals jealousy, envy, inferiority and a lack of maturity and self-esteem. When we are inclined to consider ourselves "somewhat" and better than others, we would do well to realize that there are many others, probably in any race, who can excel and exceed us in whatever we attempt. We really have no justification to consider ourselves special simply because of our race.

## **Christ's Will**

How does the will of Christ deal with this problem? Romans 10:12, *"For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him."* Acts 10:34,35, *"Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him."*

These passages teach that God considers every person a soul worth saving and the plan of salvation is open to all on the same terms. Jesus used the Samaritan as an example of a man who showed love toward his neighbor. John the Baptist warned that the day of dependence on fleshly ancestry to be acceptable to God would soon end. The long standing social traditions that alienated one from another would come crashing down. But they would have to fall through teaching, not through violence and revolution that usually set prejudice in cement for generations to come. The "crash programs" designed to remove prejudice usually make the removal of prejudice far more difficult. They may temporarily remove some of the effects of prejudice. But people must be converted in heart to the doctrine that God loves every soul, and it is the will of Christ that all be treated as each would want the other to treat him. This is the "golden rule." (Matthew 7:12).

Something that ought help us become less prejudice is to remember the brotherhood of the human family. Acts 17:26, *"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth..."* The fact that God created Adam and Eve, from whom we have come, verifies this relationship. Not only is there Biblical evidence to this brotherhood of man physically, but scientific evidence as well. We do not propose to explain where the different races originated because we are not informed. *"But foolish and unlearned (untaught, JWB) questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strife."* (Second Timothy 2:23). If we never know why there are such varieties among the human family, our ignorance of that does not discount the fact that we are of one blood and ultimate origin.

## **Problems Atop Problems**

We often create problems trying to remove problems. This is true in dealing with racial prejudice. Impatience is a problem, and there is good reason why impatience exists. Hypocrisy and

self-righteousness always has aggravated the problem. Some years ago a president of a northern university denounced the race riots at the University of Georgia, and they were reprehensible. But unfair discriminations existed on his own campus that had been suppressed through intimidation and there were no riots. Racial prejudice will not likely be dissolved, even eased, until each one consider himself. No one section, no one race, no one element of society has a monopoly on racial prejudice. Some, while denouncing it, exploit it for their own advancements as far as they can. Everything from the raised fist and the shouts of "Black Power" to the Ku Klux Klan has been in evidence. We would again insist, though it demands patience, education in the way of God is the only way to remove racial prejudice. We may be able to remove some injustices and unfair treatment through laws, demonstrations, threats and such like, and this has been prominent in race relationships in our time, we shall never remove the taproot of one of humanities evils, racial prejudice, until there is greater conformity to the will of Christ.

### **Necessary Mixing?**

Should we advocate an across-the-board mixing of all races? Is this what God requires? We think not, nor can we find the Bible calls for that. We have good reason to be proud of the race to which we belong and so do others of other races. All men have this right. But can we justify some being advanced over others just because of race? Can we exonerate a system of justice that is unequal? Can we "hate" one color but "love" another? It is not really a question of mixing the races. The races have been intermingled through the ages of history. The question is, "To what extent are they to be intermingled in keeping with God's will? What does His law teach us?"

Some cry against intergration in the schools, but would deny fairness toward those who are not of their race. Some would have certain people ride in the back of the bus for no reason other than color of skin. While it has proven expedient in many instances for there to be congregations predominantly one color or the other, to contend that this is a "must" is wrong. If we are to have segregated congregations, let it be because it may be easier to reach the lost with this arrangement, not because of racial antagonism or because we think God requires it. Let us be honest about!

### **Intermarriage**

Inevitably comes the question, "Do you favor intermarriage of the races?" Both the answer and the reason for the answer is important. It is not favored. We do not doubt that with more racial intermingling there will be more such marriages. Wisdom, experience, good judgment and the vast host of problems that would accompany such marriages in our society place unwarranted strains on such marriages that they would be more likely to fall, dissolve, or provide unhappiness possibly for generations. We would also not encourage a rich girl to marry a poor boy, or an educated man to marry an illiterate woman, or even people with extremely different customs. We do not favor such things on the grounds of wisdom and expedience. But have we the Scripture at hand that teaches such marriages are necessarily sinful, even interracial marriages? If so, where is the passage? Produce it! While it may be unwise to enter into a marriage with so many strikes against it from the start, where does the Bible teach it is a sin?

We should teach our children to seek those with whom they have an extensive compatibility, especially to marry a Christian. Some are so warped about race that they would never allow a marriage outside of their own race, but seem to care little about marriages to those who will take their souls to hell.

### **Spiritually Brethren**

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.*" Spiritually, we become united in Christ. When a Jew is baptized he does not cease to be of Jewish ancestry and lineage. When a male is baptized he does not cease to be male. When a black, white, someone big or little, rich or poor obeys the gospel, these things do not change. But our spiritual relationship with each other changes. Our attitude toward each other changes. We can recognize these differences because they still exist, but these differences will not separate us spiritually, but will make us brothers who are considerate of our differences and treat one another kindly.

I once baptized a black man, and he went down black and came up black, just like I went down white and came up white when I was baptized. But if we have the right spirit, we are brothers in Christ, and are determined that such differences that we both recognize exist shall not separate our fellowship in the Lord. We will treat each other fairly, considerately, helping each other get to heaven. Is not that the way it should be?

## **The Right Of Choice**

Christians have the right and privilege of choosing their companions, closest friends, daily associations, without being racially prejudiced, and we should grant that right to everyone without branding it prejudice. We make discriminations among those of our own race in many matters. Certainly it is not wrong to make certain distinctions elsewhere. All discrimination is not evil. But unfair, unjust, unkind, injurious discrimination is evil. The latter is motivated by racial prejudice and even hatred.

Many of us stand guilty as charged in this matter. Who is guiltless? Because the guilt is so widespread the problem is hard to solve. Many good people in other areas of life have stumbled here. Peter and Barnabas did, and Paul rebuked them for it (Galatians 2:11,12). It has hindered our work among many elements of human beings. It has soured our attitude toward many good people. It has caused the church and individual Christians great embarrassment because of our inconsistency and guilt.

### **Matthew 7:12**

Cannot you almost hear the wail that the solution offered is to simplistic? But the matter goes back to the teaching of Christ and our attitude toward others. The "golden rule" is still a good place to start. When God considers every soul worth the price of His Son's blood, who am I or you to declare that all people of a certain class, element or group regarding race are this way, that way, some other way, without taking the individual into consideration. We might ask ourselves if Jesus sought to save those who were not His fleshly race? Should we do as He did? Did He persecute and mistreat anyone? Why should we? Are all blacks just alike? Are all Jews just alike? Are all whites just alike? Are we not individual souls before God, and deserve to be looked upon that way?

If you disagree with these sentiments do not become too upset. Others have also disagreed. But be calm and considerate. If you really are disturbed over it, write me. We both should study the matter in fairness and in the light of truth. But what is said here would go a long way toward making the world a better place if we would apply these things. As I write this, I think the best place for me to start is with me. Will you start with you?

† † † † †



## **A False Criticism**

The members of the Lord's church have so often been subjected to all kinds of criticisms. Sometimes the criticism is just. But often it borders on the ridiculous. In recent years we have observed some of these "pendulum preachers," those who once berated the church while they propagated their human legalism, but now find it more to their liking to spout the liberal line of unity in diversity, errors regarding marriage and divorce, just about the whole batch of ugly things one can invent to say against members of the church. But very often they stub their toe badly, however.

Not long ago I read from one of these pendulum people critical of brethren trying to encourage people to become members of the church. He said you never read of such a thing, but that Christians were members of the body.

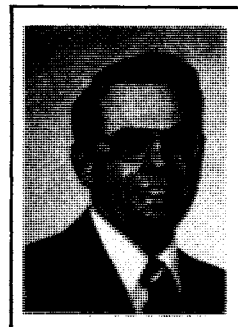
Does he not know that the body is the church and the church is the body? (Ephesians 1:22,23; Colossians 1:18). Sure he does. But when you are a revolutionary, with a passion for attacking, without much regard for what you attack, you are capable of saying most anything.

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# A Burning Fire



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



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# **What Of Your Tomb?**

First Corinthians 1:23, *"But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness."*

First Corinthians 2:2, *"For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified."*

The Jews gloried in signs, usually of their own selection and naming. Unless they approved the sign they would disapprove Jesus whose identity was confirmed before them. The Gentiles refused Christ because He did not meet their predetermined standards of worldly wisdom and reason, things in which they gloried. Paul said, *"But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world."* (Galatians 6:14). Christians are not offended by the cross but accept it as *"the power of God and wisdom of God."* (First Corinthians 1:24).

A Scottish preacher of years past who was very concerned about the declining moral standards in his own time once said, *"When I turned away from preaching mere morality, and began to preach more on redemption through the death of Jesus, then I noted significant changes for good in the lives of my hearers."* With the foregoing thoughts in mind, the cross of Christ, the need for morality, let us consider the theme, *"What About Your Tomb?"*

## **His Tomb**

All will surely grant that somewhere, sometime, at some place, there will be your tomb. What kind of place will it be? The thought may be unpleasant but not intended to be morbid nor sensational. We rather think it is realistic to consider such things because we can be motivated to live properly if we think on the tomb. Let us consider first the tomb of Jesus with which we shall make comparisons with our own tombs.

Matthew 28:1-6, *"In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: and for fear of him the keeper did*

*shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye, for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay."* With reverence, awe and respect let us join the women and see the place where the Lord lay. As we look into it we see that it is empty. Our hope is refreshed concerning His resurrection and ours. He said He would come forth. The empty tomb is evidence of His resurrection. If He had remained dead His tomb would not be empty. But what else can we say of the tomb of Jesus?

It was a place of sorrow. The place where we lay the bodies of loved ones is always a place of mixed emotions, among them the emotion of sorrow. As we visit such places, fond memories are revived, but sad ones rush upon us. The disciples of Jesus loved Him and this place was a place of grief and mourning. Just as the day of resurrection turned the sorrow into gladness, the day Jesus died and was buried was one of crushing sadness for those who loved Him.

### **More About His Tomb**

Do we not hope that those who might visit our tombs would be touched with sorrow because we have left their company? Where you and I shall be placed after death will be a place of tears that will flow from the eyes of those with whom we had the lovely privilege of sojourning a few years in this life.

The tomb of Jesus was a place of humiliation. Death is the great humbling experience called death. It marks man's powerful and famous will come to the tomb. Death brings the end of plans and earthly purposes. The tomb is the climax of this great humbling experience called death. It marks man's inevitable submission to death in his struggle to perpetuate his earthly life.

None have been more humiliated than our Lord. In spite of all of His noble works and words, they seemed to have come to a momentary halt and amounted to nothing in the silence of the tomb. His followers were also humiliated because they had trusted Him. Here was the King of kings lying dead in the stone of a borrowed tomb. The Savior of all was mocked because He did not save Himself.

Regardless of the heights any of us may reach in this life, just as was true of the tomb of Jesus, our tombs will be monuments to our inability to sustain earthly life. It will mark our ultimate

humiliation along with all others who have gone before us. Superior in life, or inferior, what will it all matter when we are leveled in death!

The tomb of Jesus was a place of some splendor. Even though it was a borrowed tomb it was originally intended for a rich man. Josphe of Arimathea had taken the body from the cross with Nicodemus, took it into the burial garden, a place of peace, tranquility and doubtless among the serenity that certain portions of nature can provide.

From the time Jesus left heaven we note a gradual but certain descending, step by step, until His death on the cross and burial in the tomb. From there the glorious ascent began. Though crucified among thieves as if he was a criminal, He was buried in rich splendor.

### **My Tomb - Your Tomb**

We will not likely know to what extent there may be splendor of our tombs. Some have been placed in huge and elaborate buildings amidst the most extravagant surroundings. Others may not even have their grave marked. Our tombs may be humble places with unpretentious markings. Some might have a giant monument, even a memorial of vast wealth. Often those who remain will expend huge sums to honor the dead who neglected to give even a flower or a word of kindness to the same person when they lived. We would do well to heed the admonition, "Do not withhold all the flowers until the grave."

The tomb of Jesus was a place of rest for the body that had suffered so much. Revelation 14:13 offers comfort. *"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them."* If those who follow Christ enjoy rest at death, surely He did. It came as a relief from the agony He had endured during His perfect life, but even more that He suffered in His death. There comes a time when the toils of life are over. Those who have fought faithfully the good fight of faith look with anticipation to the rest and deliverance that comes with death. The storms on the sea of our earthly existence are finally calmed as the tabernacle of clay is placed into its place.

Our tombs will be places of rest for the weary body. This body that is so prone to weakness, fatigue, stress, strain, injury and weariness will lay quietly in the tomb at last and return to the dust from whence it was made.

Thus far, my tomb, your tomb, and the tomb of Jesus are very much alike. They are places of sadness, humiliation, possibly some measure of splendor and rest. But there is something more about the tomb of Jesus that may be true of our tombs, but then again may not be true.

### **Shall It Be?**

The tomb of Jesus was a place of triumph. In a place probably not much larger than a very small room there was waged the greatest struggle of all ages. The most powerful of forces were engaged in mortal combat. Here was waged the real battle of life and death; a struggle of all time and eternity.

On one side was the evil power of Satan and his forces of wickedness. He was the ruler over death, his last and greatest unconquered weapon which he uses to subvert and enslave mankind, seeking to deprive everyone from the salvation God desires to give. On the other side was the power of God and the forces of righteousness, the Creator of life, the Preserver of life, the Maker of the way whereby men may live eternally in glory. The battle that was fought and the victory that was won was decisive. Jesus came forth from the dead, coming from that tomb triumphantly. Death was no longer unconquered. It was a personal victory for the lowly Nazarene, but more than His personal victory it was. It was a victory for all humankind. His victory proves His power to give life to all who come to Him. Because He was raised we can join with Paul in declaring, *"So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."*

### **Due To Him**

Because of the victory of Jesus we can be in that company of which Paul wrote in First Thessalonians 4:16,17, *"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in*

*the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."* Because of the tomb of Jesus is a tomb of victory and He lives we also can change our tombs into places of victory at our resurrection. Jesus said in John 5:28, *"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice."* The next verse show the resurrection and direction of every soul. *"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."* Which it will be for me and you depends on what we do concerning Christ in this life. He offers to give us the benefits of His victory. We can make our tombs places of victory, but only if we come to and abide in Christ.

The question facing each of us, "What of our tomb?" In some ways they will be like the tomb of Jesus. But will they be like His tomb in the way that matters most? We can make it whatever we will.

† † † † †

## ***Weakness To Strength***

There was a very tense moment at the seizure of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Mark 14:48-53, *"And Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not; but the scriptures must be fulfilled. And they all forsook him, and fled. And there followed a certain young man, having a linen cloth about his naked body; and the young man laid hold of him; and he left the linen cloth and fled from them naked. And they led Jesus away to the high priest; and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes."*

### **Weakness**

In this account we have a dramatic moment when an unidentified young man, who was obviously following Jesus, but who also was frightened at the events taking place, ran away. It is usually thought that this panic-stricken young man was none

other than the writer, John Mark. The reluctance to name oneself was characteristic of those who wrote at that time. This was a frantic, embarrassing, threatening experience for him, when he, like all the others who had followed Jesus, ran away and forsook Christ. It shows his fear of being aligned with Jesus, revealing his immaturity, spiritual weakness and lack of conviction, being void of courage and fearful at that moment in his life.

We may be inclined to excuse him by saying that he was not the only one who fled. This is true. Did not Peter stoutly declare he would die for Him rather than forsake Him? Was not this the stand of all of the disciples? Yet, they did just what they said they would not do. Mark was not alone in abandoning Jesus.

Some might take comfort in their weakness by reminding themselves of the weaknesses of others. But the failure in others does not excuse nor lessen our own failures. The actions of all the friends of Jesus were regrettable. But we must recognize the weakness of John Mark at this moment even though he may have been adversely influenced.

## **Strength**

But the life of John Mark cannot be properly told only by using the word weakness. That would leave a false impression of him. It would distort the real person. We must also include the word strength. Both words, weakness and strength, are significant and revealing in this man's character, as well as that of most of us.

But let it be stressed how important the relationship of these two words really is. What we contend is that it makes a great difference whether one is weak or strong, but it also makes a great difference whether one is going from weakness toward strength or going from strength toward weakness. Where we are in living the Christian way of life is important. But the direction we are going is also vital. Some lives have begun with great strength only to be dissipated into weakness, such as King Saul, the first king of Israel. Even Solomon might qualify as one who went from strength to weakness. Demas, who fell away and forsook Paul, went from strength to weakness. Judas is a classic example of it also.

But others may begin in weakness and proceed to strength. Such was the life of John Mark. We all begin our service to Christ in weakness but must go forward toward spiritual

strength.

The life of Mark can be assembled by the bits and pieces that we have revealed to us concerning him. We need to study this man because it is a source of encouragement to us, an inspiration to press on and keep trying. Every Christian can look back in his life and find some humiliating, weak, frail even sinful disappointment in himself and the way he failed in doing something he needed to do. Every Christian is involved in a life of growing from where he is toward where he needs to be. We are all moving, hopefully, from weakness toward strength. We do not live perfectly. We suffer setbacks along the way.

### **A Battle - The War**

But we must remember that failure in one battle does not necessarily mean defeat in the entire war. Are you aware that the South won more battles than did the North in the War between the States in America? Yet, the war was won by the North. The devil knocks us down at times. But that does not have to spell our defeat and surrender to him.

John Mark was a man whose first name, John, was Jewish, and his other name, Mark, was Roman. This indicates the possibility that he, like Paul, was a Roman citizen, although this is not certain, nor very important.

He was a kinsman of Barnabas. Knowing a person's family sometimes explains why people are like they are, although that is not always an infallible standard by which to determine a person's character. Barnabas was a man of great influence for good in the early days of the church. In Acts four we read of his liberality in laying gifts at the feet of the apostles for use in the cause of Christ. He was known as the son of exhortation and consolation. He had lived a life of encouraging others. He had been a companion to Paul later in his life. He was unwilling to cast John Mark aside when John Mark blundered another time, as we shall consider. Doubtless this great man had a tremendously good influence over John Mark.

### **More On Mark**

Mark had an excellent background and upbringing for laboring in the Masters vineyard. His home was a gathering place of the early Christians for prayer when Peter and others were imprisoned. When Peter and John were released from prison

they went to the home of the mother of Mark, which indicates that they knew this was a frequent place for good brethren to gather. Having Christian brethren in the home is always a good influence on children.

Mark very likely was converted by Peter because Peter referred to him as his "son" in the same sense as Paul referred to Timothy (First Peter 5:13). With his background it is little wonder that he was asked to accompany Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. His duties were to minister to these men, helping them in whatever way he could. He was considered prepared for that labor, although he proved otherwise.

On this first journey Mark experienced a second failure of his life, at least in the eyes of Paul. Mark turned away from the work at a crucial time and went back home.

There has been much speculation why Mark went back. He had seen the success of the work in Cyprus and Paul's encounter with the sorcerer, Eymas, when Paul struck him blind because he hindered Serguis Paulus from hearing the truth. The tour seemed destined for great results. But as they went inland from the sea, Mark decided to go no further.

Some have supposed he got homesick. Others have thought he preferred to work with Peter rather than Paul and Barnabas. Some have been very charitable and suggested he went home to care for his mother. Other have said he might have been too prejudiced to have accepted taking the gospel to the Gentiles. The fact remains that we do not know why he went home, but only that he did. Whatever the real reason, it was sufficiently injurious to Paul's mind to cause Paul to refuse to allow him to accompany them on a second journey when time came for them to leave. He *"had not gone with them to the work"* as Paul thought he should have done. The difference that arose between Barnabas and Paul over John Mark was so deep that Barnabas was willing to take Mark, but Paul was not. This contention grew until the two leaders separated and went their separate ways into the work, Barnabas taking Mark and Paul taking Silas. Whatever was behind this great contention, it cannot be denied that Mark's failure to stay with the work was a disappointment because he had not met the measure as He should have done.

### **Both Were Right**

Someone has suggested that Paul was right about the truth that Mark gave in too easily on that first journey. But Barnabas was right about Mark just as he had been right about Paul. He saw Mark's potential and what Mark was capable of becoming for the Lord and His work.

Later, even Paul recognized the value of Mark and mentioned him as a faithful co-worker (Philemon 24). Mark did become a respected and respectable leader of Christians. In Rome he was one of the faithful who stood by Paul. In Colosse the church was urged to receive him. In Babylon he was with Peter in the work. In Ephesus and Asia Minor Paul said, "*Bring Mark with you.*" (Second Timothy 4:11). Once Paul considered Mark a hindrance but later he considered him a source of joy. The Holy Spirit chose this man Mark to be one of the four to write an inspired account of the life of Christ while He was on earth.

Such failures as Mark experienced at the onset might have caused some of lesser character to have fallen into disarray and defeat. Many have failed to grow strong because of smaller reasons. But there were several factors that caused Mark to grow from his weakness into his strength.

### **Credit Belongs To Several**

Mark deserves much credit himself. It took stamina, conviction, determination, resolve, knowledge and devotion to make the gains he made. It also took the severe rebukes from Paul which doubtless aroused him to self-examination and challenged him to improve. It helped him to see his own failures and where he needed to improve. Those rebukes assisted him in seeing his latent talents.

But it also took the patient, kind and persistent understanding of Barnabas who did not give up on him in his hour of failure. What might have happened to Mark without the encouragement from Barnabas can only be a speculative matter. But those who grow from weakness to strength usually have somebody, somewhere, who stands by them, not condoning their weaknesses but encouraging them to come out of them. Barnabas did this for John Mark.

Surely, credit belongs to the Lord from whom all strength is derived. All these sources combined led Mark to become a blessing to the cause of Christ and even yet a blessing to all mankind today thousands of years after his life and death.

We are fortunate to have this record about Mark. It helps us to

take heart in our own failures. It leads us to not allow our setbacks knock us out. His life proves that the past failures need not prevent us from being what we can and ought to be. Failures will make us humble. They will enable us to be aware of our dependence and weakness. Many have profited immeasurably from past errors. They have turned them from being stumblingblocks into stepping stones and grown stronger in spite of them.

We can overcome our sins and faults and be pleasing to God. God knows we are often weak and He is not pleased with our weakness. But when He sees we are striving to go forward from weakness toward strength, this is pleasing in His sight. Christian growth must be the goal of our life. Moving toward spiritual maturity, becoming more and more like Jesus, this is our aim and purpose. We can outgrow our weaknesses.

### **Why The "T"?**

The story is told of a man who was caught stealing and was branded across his forehead with the letter "T" that stood for thief. As the years passed this man learned to read and spell. Living in a distant western town where few could read and write, he soon became the man who would read letters that would come to others, and write their answers for them. As the people began to value reading and writing they asked him to teach them and their children how to read and write. Year after year he taught them. Finally, as an old man, he died. As his body laid in his coffin, one father walked by with his son. The son, not knowing the man's past, noticed the branded "T" on his forehead and asked his father what it meant. The father either had never known or had forgotten, but he said to his son, "It must mean Teacher."

From defeat to victory is the story. Is not this what God offers us through Christ? In Him we can be what we are capable of being. We can live this life acceptably and leave it with the assurance of heaven. We can grow from our weaknesses and become strong. May God help each of us to make this a major ambition in life.

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# **Prophecy Fulfilled At His Birth**

One task before every Christian is to show every generation that the religion of Christ is of divine origin. This demands that there be evidence that the Bible is God's Word. While men wrote the words, the words were chosen by Deity. Among several evidences that this is true is the prophecy-fulfillment element of the Scriptures.

A prophet was one who spoke for God. He did this both by preaching and by predicting, by forthtelling and foretelling. The preaching that the prophets did was by the direction and authority of God. The predictions they made concerned the future and were beyond the normal ability of men to know regarding what was to transpire by their own experiences or immediate conditions. Their kind of prophecy is common to Scripture, but not done today since the complete will of God has been revealed to man through the Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17), which affirms the verbal inspiration, infallibility, inerrancy, authoritativeness and all-sufficiency of the Scriptures.

To foretell the future accurately is quite noteworthy. Moses wrote, *"But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously; thou shalt not be afraid of him."* (Deuteronomy 18:20-22). *"The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord hath truly sent him."* (Jeremiah 28:9). No man has the power to look into the future except God grant him that ability. Only God can know the future. Men can know concerning the future what God reveals to them. When events are prophesied centuries before they occur and even foretold in detail, none can doubt that such is evidence of supernatural and divine guidance. This is the kind of prophecy and fulfillment that is repeatedly found in the Scriptures.

## Concerning Christ

The first two chapters of Matthew reveal several matters of importance such as the genealogy of Jesus and the events relating to His birth. In these two chapters we have the record of the fulfillment of many prophecies. They are too numerous to discuss them all in one lesson. We shall confine our consideration to four that are specifically mentioned by Matthew. In this way we can teach information vital to the understanding of Christ, His nature and mission plus strengthen ourselves in the evidence that the Bible is the Word of God.

An angel came to Mary to inform her she would bear a son and that He was to be named Jesus, which means Savior, because *"he shall save his people from their sins."* (Matthew 1:21). Mary asked, *"How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?"* (Luke 1:34). Mary was a virgin, but betrothed to Joseph. Even so, the angel said she would bear a son according to a prophecy uttered nearly seven hundred fifty years earlier. He quoted Isaiah 7:14, which reads, *"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."*

It is tragic that the Revised Standard Version, produced by those who deny the birth of a son by a virgin, and deny the Deity of Jesus Christ, has perverted this passage by changing *"virgin"* to merely *"young woman."* But one can be a young woman and not be a virgin. This alteration and altercation against the Word allows for the denial of the virgin birth, the very thing these "translators" wanted to deny. A second tragedy regarding the virgin birth and the RSV is that some, for reasons unexplainable, wish to throw their lot with the modernists and deniers and uphold the RSV as a reliable version. God will not hold them guiltless regardless of their "scholarship."

## Almah

Mary was more than just a young woman. She was a virgin. The word "almah" means more than just young woman. It means a young, marriageable, unmarried, chaste woman. That is a virgin. But this prophecy was given seven and one half centuries before it was fulfilled, and Jesus was the only one to meet the demands of prophecy. This is not a coincidence but irrefutable evidence of divine guidance both regarding the prophecy and the birth. If anyone doubts that the term "almah"

should be translated as “virgin” in Isaiah 7:14, let him allow himself the wisdom to agree with the way Matthew, writing by inspiration, interpreted and translated it.

Mary and Joseph were of Nazareth, yet Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Augustus Ceasar ordered an enrollment and taxation that was to be conducted according to one’s ancestral home. Since both Mary and Joseph were descendants of David and Bethlehem was the city of David, they made the journey southward for this purpose. It was while they were in Bethlehem that Jesus was born.

His birth was unusual, not only because Mary conceived while she was still a virgin, but because it occurred in a manger, there being no room in the inn for them. It occurred in the city of Bethlehem as had been prophesied in Micah 5:2, *“But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”* Reference to this prophecy is recorded in Matthew 2:5,6. How could Micah have known such an unlikely event except God revealed it to him? Even the scribes and priests recognized this prophecy as being of divine origin. It was not “luck” that it all occurred there.

### **Visits**

After visits from shepherds and the wise men, Joseph was warned to take Jesus to Egypt to flee the intent of Herod to kill the child. Herod had learned of His birth from the wise men and the Scriptures noted by the scribes. He feared any other king than himself and Ceasar.

Joseph obeyed the direction given him and fled as instructed. This is a normal reaction. But the place to which he fled was designated for him. He was to take the Child and His mother to Egypt. This is important when we realize this event was foretold seven and one half centuries before it happened. Hosea 11:1, *“Out of Egypt did I call my Son.”* (See Matthew 2:14,15). God had called the nation of Israel out of Egypt as a type of the coming of Jesus Christ from Egypt. Upon leaving Egypt Joseph took the child to Nazereth, and this also was in fulfillment of prophecy that He would be called a Nazarene. But we omit discussing this prophecy here (Matthew 2:23).

### **Herod’s Evil Deed**

There is another prophecy we shall consider that was in connection with the escape from Herod. Herod was unable to locate the Child when the wise men, being warned of God, returned home another way rather than to reveal to Herod His whereabouts. This allowed Joseph time to make the escape. Seeing his failure, Herod ordered the slaughter of all male children in the area of Bethlehehem that had been born about the time of the birth of Christ. We can properly consider the slaughter to have occurred around two years after His birth since children up to that age were among the victims. Such inhumanity to man has seldom been executed in history. Even though there were probably few children involved, we can appreciate the agony of it if we can imagine one of our own being among those murdered.

Jeremiah had foretold this vicious deed and the agony of it in Jeremiah 31:15. *"Thus saith the Lord; A voice was heard in Ramah, and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not."* Matthew 2:18 cites this prophecy that was made nearly six hundred years earlier in connection with the event. How could Jeremiah have known? The only reasonable, logical and sensible explanation is the true one; namely, by divine inspiration and revelation from God. Jeremiah was a true prophet of the true God, and God is all-knowing, all-seeing, and ever-present as well as all-powerful.

The story of the birth of Jesus is a beautiful story that is told over and over but never loses its brilliance. We can be thankful for the manifestation of God's love and grace that Deity took on the form of flesh. We are thankful for what He did while in the flesh, including His death, burial and resurrection which gives the hope through Him and the forgiveness of sins made possible by His blood. It is because of these later events that the birth of Jesus takes on greater importance.

But we can also rejoice that God has seen fit to reveal these events to us and shown us that He provided His prophets this information long before it took place. In this way we can be sure of the integrity of the Scriptures and the certainty that God's hand was in it all. It is as if God has placed His signature at the end of the Book.

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# **To Be Orthodox**

The word "orthodox" is not found in our English translations of the Bible but the meaning of the word is prominent. "Orthodox" means to be sound in doctrine and practice. To be "sound" means to be free from flaws, unimpaired by error, approved by the standard. Regarding the faith of Christ it means to *"speak... the things which become sound doctrine,... sound speech that cannot be condemned."* (Titus 2:1,8). It means to uphold the New Testament without perversion, distortion, alteration, addition or subtraction (Revelation 22:18,19). It means to *"stand fast in the faith."* (First Corinthians 16:13). As expressed in the Old Testament, *"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls..."* (Jeremiah 6:16). Paul wrote, *"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine."* (Second Timothy 4:1,2). The similar sentiments of Galatians 1:6-10 give us definitions of "orthodoxy."

Being orthodox in word is not always popular because some are willing to turn away from the faith, refusing to endure sound doctrine (Second Timothy 4:3,4). In a day of denial that there are absolutes and standards, orthodoxy is equated with bigotry, prejudice, irrelevance, Pharisaism and other derogatory terms. But the plea of the Lord's church is to go back to the Bible, *"speaking as the oracles of God,"* speaking where the Bible speaks and being silent where the Bible is silent. We seek to restore New Testament Christianity as the Scriptures reveal by planting the *"seed of the kingdom,"* which is the Word of God, in honest and good hearts (Luke 8:11). Only the gospel will save (Romans 1:16; First Corinthians 15:1-4; James 1:21).

## **Do We Stop?**

But are we truly being orthodox when we preach the gospel but stop there? Do we "talk" the faith, but not "walk" the faith? Are we doers of the Word, or hearers only? Does not being orthodox require both word and deed?

The Bible was translated into the language of the Navajo Indians, not by one of our brethren, but a Roman Catholic. Was not that a great service?

The village of Dunkirk, New York decided to assist the city in France of the same name, raising funds to show compassion and benevolence. This was not the action of the church. The church is unknown there we are told.

On one shipload of missionaries while at sea several years ago, over one hundred families being included, only one was of the church of Christ.

When one becomes sick, who provides? Who cares for the sick, orphans, those needing nursing homes, the elderly, victims of poverty, hunger, drunkenness, drugs, lack of clothing and other such needs?

Who takes the biggest part of visiting jails, county homes, providing opportunities for spiritual growth for college students, sending physical and spiritual provisions to people around the world?

We can hear some say, "This is not the work of the church. We do not subscribe to a social gospel. This is not our mission." But that comment is only partly right, and therefore, partly wrong. It is true that much of the work mentioned above is not the work of the church as a cooperate body because there is no authority for the church to be involved in doing such things. But there is work that individual Christians ought to be doing that so often too many of us are willing to let somebody else do it while we do almost nothing. We accept the fact that the needs are there, but are we so involved (and most are not overly involved even in the work of the church) that we cannot appreciate that such work must be done in our world?

## **Being Sound**

God's people claim to be proclaiming sound doctrine, although too many so-called "churches of Christ" today are not even sound in what they are teaching. But God's people are not lights in the world, the salt of the earth, or even interested in the destitute, diseased, hungry, discouraged, lonely, weary, bereaved and despressed. This is certainly not true of all, but it is too true of too many. Does not the doing of good have a place somewhere in being orthodox? Was not our Lord concerned about such things, even though they were not primary? The point we wish to make is simply that there is more to being

orthodox than just words of orthodoxy. Who can dispute that? Could it be that many think these things are not ours because the local congregation is not to be involved in them? Do we have to wait until there is some "church structure" before we can be orthodox in deeds?

### **Pertinent Passages**

James 1:22-25, *"Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass. For he beholdeth himself and goeth his way, and straitway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed."*

First Thessalonians 1:5, *"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance, as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake."* Was there not action with Paul as well as inspired teaching?

Acts 1:1 tells that Luke had written of the things that *"Jesus began both to do and to teach."*

There are two parts to First Peter 4:11. *"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God."* But the verse continues. *"If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth."* Matthew 5:16, *"Let your light so shine that others may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."*

Jeremiah 6:16 urges that one not simply "talk" the old paths, but *"walk therein."* How can we miss the point?

In Matthew 25 the five foolish virgins were left out because they did not do what they should have done. The one talent man was condemned because he failed to act. Those cast out as goats were not condemned because of what they did but because of what they did not do that they should have done. Omission was the sin laid to their charge.

Luke 10 tells of the Samaritan. The priest and Levite were considered orthodox in word and worship although they had their failings even there if they were as most were. But they were

so "orthodox" that they could allow a suffering man remain in a state of desperation awaiting death to relieve him, or some "unorthodox" Samaritan to do something for him. They were so "orthodox" that they could pass by on the other side. James 4:17, *"Therefore, to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."*

### **The Lord's Rebuke**

Christ scathingly rebuked the Pharisees in Matthew 23. They contended for a verbal orthodoxy, which they ought to have done, even though they did not follow their own rule. But they criticized every good deed toward suffering humanity that Jesus performed. Matthew 23:3,4, *"All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do ye not after their works; for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers."*

They were not condemned so much because of what they said as much as for what they did not do. If we are of the same mentality and manner of life, do we stand in line for the same condemnation? Christian orthodoxy means preaching the Word with soundness. But it also means service. Matthew 23:11, *"But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant."* Galatians 6:10, *"As we have therefore opportunity, let us to good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."*

Never let it be misunderstood. The primary work of the church is to save souls and glorify God. This is accomplished by preaching the saving gospel to a sin-contaminated world. But let it also be understood that, according to the authority of the Word, individuals and the church collectively, must be active, aggressive and constant in doing good works as much as abstaining from evil.

Are we content to **say** and **do not**? Matthew 7:21, *"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."* Lack of love for those less fortunate is to lack the compassion Jesus demonstrated. Selfishness and self-concern, stinginess, greed, covetousness and disinterest about others are sins that condemn the soul. The failure to develop Christian maturity in both mission-mindedness and charity-mindedness are both unworthy of the definition of orthodoxy.

## **The Promise**

Only the orthodox have the promise of heaven. False teachers, liars, adulterers, thieves, those of profane tongue and greedy heart shall be excluded. Those who depend on their works alone and obey not the gospel shall be excluded. But those who obey the form of doctrine but do not practice daily Christlike living shall also be excluded.

We have seen signs over doorways into assembly rooms that read, "Enter To Worship; Leave To Serve." This captures the thrust of this lesson. Titus 2:14, the very chapter where sound doctrine is stressed, speaks how we are to be "*a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*" Titus 3:14, "*And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful.*"

Whether in congregational efforts that are authorized that demonstrate the benevolent work of the church, or in individual actions we can and should take to help others, let us be as determined to be orthodox here as we are in matters of doctrine and faithful word. How can we argue against such a position? How can we be content to follow any other course?

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## **Enemies of the Cross**

Philippians 3:18,19, "*For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are enemies of the cross of Christ; whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.*"

Here was a realism that caused Paul grief. How could anyone be an enemy to that which God has used to offer salvation to mankind? Yet, there were such people. Are there not such people even yet, in and out of the church whose characteristics are like those Paul lists?

We would be blind and naive to think there are none who would advance themselves, their gain, regardless how shamefully, that would oppose Christ and his truth for their own sake?

(continued page 24)

# **Paul To The Colossians**

There ought to be a good reason for studying any particular lesson and we have the very best reason. Paul was an inspired apostle of Jesus Christ and spoke authoritatively, being guided by the Holy Spirit. What he preached was from God, not man. God's Word always deserves a hearing.

In Colosse there were Christians who needed further teaching. As in most places certain doctrines and philosophies plagued the growth of the church and the purity of understanding. Inasmuch as God's Word does not change, what Christians needed to know then is what Christians need to know now. Our lesson is somewhat of a summary of the major points that Paul presented to those Christians by the epistle to the Colossians. We want to present an outline of this valuable, interesting and informative book that stresses many matters, including how the Christian is supposed to live.

Chapter one includes Paul's word of thanks for the faith, hope and love of the Colossian brethren. Such is the fruit of the gospel. These three tremendous spiritual qualities had become theirs through the *"word of the truth of the gospel."* (1:5). Would it not be a mark of goodness if every congregation was the kind that could receive apostolic commendation because they possessed these qualities in a noticeable degree?

Paul prayed that they *"be filled with knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding."* (1:9). Paul always coupled his prayers with his own efforts. This epistle was an effort by him, as the Holy Spirit directed, to expand the knowledge, wisdom and understanding of these people.

## **Knowledge Of Deity**

What did he want them to know? They needed to know something more about God. God made it possible for them to partake of the inheritance of the saints, had delivered them out of darkness, had translated them into the kingdom of Christ, His Son (1:12,13). It is still true now. Such blessings can and will belong to anyone who comes to God through Christ. This is possible because God has made it possible.

They also needed to be reminded of something about Christ.

Christ was always with them and their redemption was provided through Him. He is the very image of Deity, the Creator and Sustainer of all things. Power and authority over all things in heaven and earth belongs to Him (1:14-17). The church is His body and He is the head of it. *"That in all things he might have the preeminence."* (1:18). It is a serious matter to claim headship of the Lord's church. It is blasphemy and an attempted usurpation and arrogant presumption for any man to assume such a title or present himself or anyone else as head of the Lord's church other than Jesus Christ.

God through Christ reconciles mankind to Himself. The reconciliation is not bringing God to man, but man to God. This is accomplished by the blood of Jesus Christ (1:20-22).

### **Knowledge Of Themselves**

They needed to know something about themselves. In times past they were alienated from God *"in your evil works."* (1:21). They had been reconciled by Christ's death. Now, holy and without blemish, unreprouvable before Him, they could stay in this cherished state *"if so be that ye continue in the faith, grounded and stedfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel which ye heard."* (1:23). What is said of Christians then remains true for Christians now. Every person who is a Christian was once in the same lost spiritual condition, in sin, on the way to spiritual destruction eternally. But now having been washed clean and redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, God would continue to keep them clean if they remained faithful.

### **Knowledge Of Him**

Paul wanted them to know something of himself. He was a minister of the glad tidings of Christ. He and others proclaimed that which was once a *"mystery,"* but now that which is revealed. A mystery is not something that cannot be known. It can be known, but only when revealed. The gospel, the scheme of redemption, was not fully known until apostolic revelation. Paul's labor and suffering of affliction was part of his work to let men know how God makes man complete in Christ (1:25-29).

Chapter two opens with how Paul was striving in order that this mystery, a hidden treasure of knowledge, wisdom and salvation, might belong to them all the more. He desired that they be rooted, builded up and established in the faith (2:7).

Today's Christians need the same development and strength. The epistles, including this one, are designed to provide the spiritual nourishment that is essential to this establishment. All of the information Paul suggests in these opening verses are needed by me and you. They are not out-of-date nor irrelevant even though written centuries ago. They are as fresh, alive, timely and practical for our age as when first given. People do not need a new gospel. They need to hear and heed the gospel that was once delivered to the saints through the apostles.

### **A Warning**

Paul gave a solemn warning. *"Beware, lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."* (2:8). In Colosse, as elsewhere, some were teaching and binding doctrines and ideas contrary to truth. Every age has its self-made legislators for the church. In nearly all of the early churches, both Gentile and Jewish teachers would attempt to impose upon brethren either the philosophies of the world or the tenets of the heathen or the Mosaic Law that had been nailed to the cross. Paul especially noted circumcision that once marked God's people, Israel. But under Christ circumcision was nothing of significance. The *"circumcision"* under Christ is of the heart, not the flesh. Now one is a child of God through the forgiveness of his sins through Christ, not the old law. The ordinances of former laws were *"against us,"* and were taken out of the way, being nailed to the cross (2:14). Therefore, Paul wrote, *"Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ."* (2:16,17). Such things characterized the old law which served as types of the new that came through Jesus Christ. Nobody is to allow anybody to take them from the head of the body, Christ, by causing them to submit to that which is no longer God's will for man.

Chapter two, verses twenty through twenty-two, were to prevent apostasy and following religious error. *"Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, [touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using]; after the commandment and doctrines of men?"*

## **Daily Living**

Chapter three puts emphasis on the lives of the Christians. It is very practical and personal. Since they were raised with Christ they were to do two things. (1) Seek the things which are above; (2) Set your mind on things above. Earthly concerns have always been a problem to brethren. Worldliness overtakes many now as it did Demas. Materialism becomes the goal and god of some who once came to Christ. It has caused Christians to be led astray from the faith. It has been historically a failing in the generations of men. It is because Christians sometimes fail to emphasize the spiritual man and overemphasize the outward man and the things of the here and now to the neglect of the soul. Seeking, thinking, planning, desiring and pursuing temporal things which are seen and forgetting the things concerning eternity which are not seen has been the downfall of many through the years. It seems mankind never learns. This world and all that is in it shall pass away. It is the Word of the Lord that endures.

*"For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."* (3:3). What does this involve? It means putting on some things and putting away others. It demands abstaining from some things, which is the negative side of the faith of Christ, and partaking of other things, the positive side. Beginning with verse five through verse ten we have a catalog of things from which we must turn away. But only refraining from evil, as good as that is, is not sufficient. We cannot live in a spiritual vacuum. Verses twelve through seventeen gives us the positive side, what to do and be.

## **Special Words**

The last portion of chapter three contains some specific instructions to wives, husbands, children, fathers, servants and any others who would be a faithful disciple of Christ. Wives are to be subject to their husbands and husbands are to love their wives. Children are to obey parents and servants are to obey masters. Masters are to render to servants their due. All are to pray to God, giving thanks, doing what is done heartily. The directions continue into chapter four, *"Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man."* (4:5,6).

Such admonitions provide cures for marital strife, domestic and home problems, juvenile delinquencies, difficulties even between enemies, solutions to problems with our fellowmen, and the solution for proper relationships with God. What could be more desirable, practical, useful, relevant, comprehensive and workable than the formula given by the inspired penman of this epistle? Is there anything available to mankind with such power and ability as the message from God?

### **Personal**

The last part of chapter four is personal in nature, yet, informative and worthy of imitation. Paul salutes his brethren cordially, commending his fellow workers. He urges them to receive faithful men that come their way. To Archippus, who may have been the primary teacher among them, he gave a special word, charging him to fulfill his ministry. This called for him to carry out his work earnestly and vigorously.

Notice something very significant in his closing remarks. He instructs that the letter not only be read there but elsewhere as well. What Paul taught one church was needful for all churches. What he taught Christians long ago is what Christians need to know and follow today.

Let me encourage you to use this brief summary as a springboard from which you will launch into a deeper study of this epistle and come away with a greater, fuller and more complete knowledge of God's will. Such a study could be a turning point for the better in your life. May we be doers of the Word and not hearers only.

† † † † †

(from page 19)

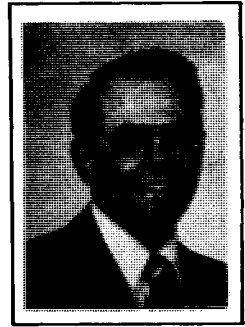
When there is drinking, adultery, profanity, compromise, unity in diversity and other false doctrines apparent within the congregation, even the eldership, and the self-serving "pulpit minister" finds it expedient to omit teaching on these matters from his sermons, who could doubt but he is just another of the kind of "*enemies of the cross of Christ*" that Paul was describing. Why are such people allowed and retained in our pulpits?

JWB



## **Constant Vigilance**

We are so often treated to the assertion that our generation is the smartest, wisest, most astute generation to have ever come upon the scene of human history. But we wonder! If we are all so smart, why are things in such a chaotic mess? Possibly it is because we are not giving due credit to those of the past, or possibly we just are not truly wise enough to learn from the past. Even the simplest matters seem to escape us. For instance, take the matter of drifting into apostasy. Cannot we learn from history that this tragic but real human experience does not just happen quickly, as if it comes overnight?



**JAMES W. BOYD**

Ecclesiastical history, and more importantly, Biblical history shows that departure from the ways of God creeps upon the human family, step by step, so often coming so slowly that nobody really grasps what is happening until we find ourselves far adrift and off course. This is the reason we must be constantly vigilant, ever alert, persistent in measuring, turning neither to the left nor right, but pressing forward toward the eternal goal, always keeping heaven before us. If we deceive ourselves by not keeping vigilance, we are the eternal losers.

\* \* \* \* \*

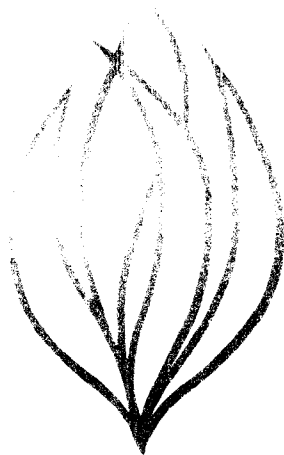
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# A Burning Fire



“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 Salt Of The Earth***

Jesus began His sermon on an unnamed mount with the Beatitudes which express characteristics of those who would compose His kingdom, and the blessings that would be theirs to enjoy. He added, *"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is henceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under the foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 5:13-16).

Jesus pictured His people in different ways, such as children, sheep, servants, branches and here like salt and light. Obviously, He is speaking figuratively or by way of comparison. But what does He mean when He says His followers are like the salt of the earth? On this question we now center our thoughts.

To understand His comparison of His disciples to salt we must understand the use and qualities of salt, especially in Jesus' day. Salt was not altogether like the purified salt to which we have become accustomed, even though there are many similarities. Salt was not mined or extracted from the sea as it often is today. Once obtained it is boiled clean. But salt was obtained in Jesus' day from marshes along the seaside, from beds of dried salt lakes. What was gathered was mixed with impurities, dust and other earth substances intermingled with the salt. The whole mixture, however, was usually identified as salt.

## **A Savour**

Salt possesses a savour, which refers to flavor, taste and such qualities. Salt was used then, as now, to improve the flavor of foods. One little boy, when asked to define salt, answered, "It is that stuff when left off 'taters, ruins them."

How is the Christian like salt? We know that food for the soul is the Word of God (First Peter 2:2; Hebrews 5:12,14). Jesus said, *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."* (Matthew 4:4). Mankind often hungers for the soul-reviving nourishment that only the

Word of God can supply. Too many seek to satisfy their spiritual appetites from the wrong source, such as the false ways of men, self-indulgence, riotous living, permissive and unrestrained conduct. But many are seeking and grasping for some food for the soul. The Christian, by living a beautiful, noble, dedicated life can make the Word of God attractive for the hungry soul. The Christian life often provides the attraction for the sinner to come to righteousness. The Christian is observed, admired and his righteousness that he has partaken from Christ soon becomes known as the "secret" of his success. Certainly, no person can so live as to improve on the Word of God, but one can so live that others will see the value of following the Word of God. This is the mission of a disciple.

Christians know the more excellent way. We sometimes wonder why more people do not feed upon the spiritual food that Christ offers. There is always the possibility that the lives of those who profess to follow God's Word have made the truth flavorless and unpalatable to the sinner. We can make the truth unattractive by living evil, inconsistent lives and displaying bad dispositions. When a "Christian" acts like that he is as salt that has lost its savour, its flavor giving properties.

### **Thirst**

Salt also has the capacity to make one thirsty. Men who are lost at sea know not to drink sea water because the salt therein only makes one more thirsty than ever. What is true in the physical realm has some comparison in the spiritual. In the Beatitudes Jesus said, *"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."* (Matthew 5:10). As the physical body cannot survive without water, neither can the soul survive without the spiritual water of life.

Jesus Christ is the water of life for man's spirit. While passing through Samaria Jesus came to a well that had been dug by Jacob. A woman came to draw water from the well and Jesus asked for a drink. John 4:6-14, *"Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well: and it was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. [For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.] Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealing with the Samaritans."*

*Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink, thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water, springing up into everlasting life."*

The Christian is like salt in that he can create thirst, make people thirsty for the blessings of being in Christ, such as inward peace, forgiveness of sins, hope of an eternal home with God, purity of conscience and fellowship with Deity and the redeemed. He can create that thirst by living a righteous example in the imitation of Jesus Christ.

Too many seem to get all they want of Christ very quickly. Again we wonder why, but we must realize they are not really thirsty for what He offers. Is it possible that those who profess Christianity have not made them thirsty?

### **Preservative**

Salt may be best known for its power to preserve. It is used in curing meat against putrefaction and corruption. It can prevent decomposition. It was so used in Jesus' day and in many instances even in our own time.

The Christian, just as he can present a pleasant taste for truth and create thirst for the water of life, can also contribute to the preservation of his fellowman. His heart and life should be an overflowing reservoir of goodness. He should stand for morality, purity, human dignity, living in such fashion that will lift others and point them to higher and nobler plains of life. The way of the rabble is not the path he trods. Rather, he preserves respect for the things of God by teaching them to his children, friends, neighbors and brethren. He preserves the sanctity of marriage and the home by making them as Christ has taught they should be. It is by his good influence that the power of Christianity is released. As long as there be those who will follow Christ, and the more who follow the more potent is their power, the world will not be completely overtaken by sin, idolatry, vice, crime,

hate, hopelessness and despair.

The forces of unrighteousness only contribute to defiling nation after nation. The Christian, by his influence and example, stands between the devil and his universal victory. Christianity is what prevents the tide of paganism from engulfing every corner of the globe. As Christians you and I are a part of the preservation of that which deserves preservation. This task makes our lives meaningful, useful and essential.

### **Bad Salt**

We must note what happens to salt when it loses its good qualities. It is branded as “*good for nothing*.” It is rendered valueless, becomes as waste matter, and is to be cast out as nothing desirable. It has ceased to function and produce as intended and expected. It is like the branch that is cut off in John 15:6, “*If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered: and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.*”

It is “*trodden under the foot of men.*” Such salt is placed in the streets and pathways, not in garden plots. No man would allow his field to be sown with salt. Even though it has lost its good qualities, it still possesses the ability to destroy the life and fertility of the soil into which it is cast. It is, therefore, thrown where people walk.

So it is with the Christian when he ceases to be what the Lord expects of him. If the Christian loses his savour, “*wherewith shall it (the world, JWB) be salted?*” To what else and to whom else can the world turn for hope, preservation and satisfaction for its needs and desires except Christ and those who walk as He walked? There is an urgency in this statement. It shows the worth of the individual Christian in the midst of a world sick with sin. Here is his most important mission. Someone, somewhere, sometime must stand for God and His truth or the race of humankind has nothing but hopelessness.

That Christian who loses his Christlikeness is branded as “*good for nothing*” as far as truth, righteousness and goodness is concerned. He will be cast from God’s good favor and presence. He will be trodden down to defeat and despair. No longer is he valuable for God, but actually becomes a power of death and evil.

### **Melt**

We might also be reminded that salt can be used to melt ice. The Christian, by his work and influence, may be able to melt the cold and hardened heart of the lost. What a noble accomplishment that is within the grasp of every child of God!

Let us pray fervently that we will learn the import of this simple comparison Jesus made between His people and salt. But, as we mentioned in the course of the lesson concerning Jesus as the water of life, let us learn to drink of Him, being continually refreshed by Him, by feeding upon His Word that saves the soul (James 1:21).

† † † † †

## ***Redemption In Christ***

Titus 2:11-15, *"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee."*

This lesson will involve reading a number of Scriptures on the theme of redemption. We often sing of redemption in Christ. "I know that my Redeemer lives." "Redeemed, redeemed, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb." "Christ the Redeemer died on the cross." These are phrases familiar to most brethren. Redemption is a frequent Biblical term that conveys what man needs, what God offers, and the benefits and blessings of a spiritual nature that can be ours through Christ.

A redeemer is one who is a kinsman, a defender, a protector, one who rescues, recovers, ransoms or buys back. Property can be redeemed, as well as slaves, or something else that may have been placed as collateral. In the Old Testament God redeemed Israel, bringing them out of Egyptian bondage, rescuing them and defending them.

Under the new covenant Christ is our Redeemer and the One

that God has provided as the means of our much needed spiritual redemption. Let us consider matters related to this redemption that we have in Christ.

### **Who Needs Redeeming?**

Those who are in need of redemption are those who are lost in sin. First Corinthians 15:1-4, *"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 according to the scriptures."* We are not born guilty of sins as the false doctrine of Calvinism teaches. Isaiah 53:6, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."* We did not come into the world already astray, but by going our own way we have gone astray. First John 3:4 teaches, *"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law."* An infant has transgressed no law of God and is not guilty of sin.

Luke 19:10, *"For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."* Romans 3:23, *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."* We sell our souls to Satan by sinning, but Christ came to buy us back. The "before and after" coming to Christ is presented in Ephesians 2:12,13, *"That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the common wealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ."* This explains how God used Christ to save us and redeemed us from condemnation.

### **The Redeemer**

Christ is the Redeemer. The angel said to Joseph shortly before the birth of the Lord, Matthew 1:21, *"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins."* Titus 2:14 underscores the truth that He *"gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity."* Anna recognized Him as the Redeemer when she saw

the Child, as recorded in Luke 2:38, *"And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem."* Romans 3:24, *"Being justified freely by his grace through redemption that is in Christ Jesus."*

Why was Jesus provided as the Redeemer of mankind from sin? *"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). Romans 5:8,9, *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him."* But let us turn our attention more closely on how God provided this redemption through Christ.

### **The Price**

The price that was paid to buy us back was the blood of Jesus. As noted in Isaiah 53:6, God laid our iniquity on Him. First Peter 1:18,19, *"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish and without spot."* As the Jews offered a special animal in their sacrifices for sin, Jesus is presented as the *"Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."* (John 1:29).

Matthew 20:28, *"Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."* Revelation 5:9, *"And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by the blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people and nation."* Hebrews 9:11-15, *"But Christ being come a 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 into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."* First Corinthians 6:20, *"For ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."* First Corinthians 7:23, *"Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men."* Ephesians 1:7, *"In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace."* Acts 20:28, *"...to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."* This array

of Scriptures proclaims for all to know that God redeems man by and through the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son.

His blood was shed at Calvary. Galatians 3:13, "*Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.*" John 19:28-37, "*After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst. Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar; and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon a hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished; and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day [for that sabbath day was a high day,] besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. Then came the soldiers, and brake the legs of the first, and of the other which was crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs, but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him who they pierced.*"

### **Redemption Offered**

To whom is this redemption available and offered? It is not a limited atonement to a select and predestined few, as Calvinism would teach. God has predestined certain people and things in the deliverance of His scheme of redemption of mankind. God has also predestined certain classes of people that will be redeemed or lost. But, however, God has left it to each person to make his own decision into which class he will be. The redemption provided through the grace of God, by His Son, with His shed blood, is available to all who make that choice and who will be redeemed. 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.*" Revelation 22:14, "*Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.*" "*And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.*" (Revelation

22:17). Christ *"became the author of salvation unto all them that obey him."* (Hebrews 5:9). The opportunity to be redeemed by the blood of Christ is open to all who hear the Word, believe it, and obey it. Those who do not do this cannot read one word of hope for their souls in all the Word of God.

This being true, we are taught to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, repent of our sins, confess our faith in Him, and be baptized into Christ, baptized into His death, baptized for the remission of sins and to be saved. There is *"one baptism"* that is the act of obedience that separates us from the state of being lost and places us into the company of the redeemed. Water baptism, in the name of Christ, enables us to reach His blood and be raised to walk in newness of life, a new creature in Christ (Romans 6:3,4; Second Corinthians 5:17). What a privilege and blessing to be among the redeemed!

† † † † †

## ***Things That Help Us To Understand God's Word***

Often in prayer we ask God to help us understand, and this is proper for us to ask (James 1:5). We believe God will help people in everything that is right. Understanding His Word is essential before we can do as He directs. Who can measure the error and confusion caused by a lack of understanding?

As in everything else for which we pray, we must also cooperate with God and put forth our effort. God does not miraculously grant us the knowledge, wisdom and understanding we need. We do not even profess to know what all are the ways God answers prayer. But we know we must do our part and not be content to expect God to do everything while we do nothing. There are things we can put to use that help us do our part. We shall consider a few of these.

### **Expectation**

One requisite to understanding is the expectation to understand. Paul wrote, *"Whereby, when ye read, ye may*

*understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.” (Ephesians 3:4). “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.” (Ephesians 5:17). We should expect to understand. Many regard the Bible as a sealed book with an insolvable mystery, beyond the ability of mortals to ever know without a special and direct intervention from God. Others think understanding belongs exclusively to the “clergy.” Neither thought is true. Paul told the Ephesians they could understand. Timothy had knowledge of the Scriptures since childhood. The epistles were to be read before the whole church for all to hear. Why should this be done if understanding was beyond them? Is God so unjust as to give us a message on which our salvation depends and then make it beyond our ability to understand it? We must rid ourselves of this nonsense that has caused millions to remain in darkness when they could have had the light of the glorious gospel open to them.*

### **Desire**

We also need to have the desire to understand the truth. “*As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.*” (First Peter 2:2). How genuine is your ambition to know truth? Some study the Bible just to prove their point against others. Some study so they can show somebody else wrong. Others study trying to find justification for some view they already hold, or to protect their prejudices, or some other less than honorable reason. We must study with open minds, willing to accept the evidence and be convinced, ready to sacrifice whatever is necessary in order to holdfast the truth. If we are not careful, we will be guilty of “reading into” the Bible what is not there rather than “reading out of the Bible” what God has placed there. Honesty and sincerity in our study should be coupled with the desire to know God’s will.

### **Common Sense**

Some confusion may arise from this next suggestion, but consider the entire point. Good common sense is necessary to understanding the Scriptures. Someone has said, “If one lacks secular knowledge, let him ask his fellowman. If he lacks religion, let him ask God. If he lacks common sense, he is out of it.” Without common sense we shall not be able to understand much of anything on any subject.

What is common sense? One said, "Common sense is the kind of sense without which all else is nonsense." But we use the term with reference to the ability to consider and weigh evidence and draw a consistent and intelligent conclusion. It includes the ability to discern between truth and error on the basis of Biblical revelation (Hebrews 5:14). It enables one to be able to see harmony between ideas, and disharmony where it exists. Without common sense one could not see the difference between Christianity and the Mohammedan religion. We may learn facts and figures, quotations and names, but without the ability to assimilate and apply our knowledge in a reasonable sequence, we will not be able to understand. Many people know a lot about the facts and figures, quotes and names of the Bible but lack understanding because they lack reasoning ability.

### **Accept The Bible**

To have understanding of the Biblical message we must recognize it as the inspired Word of God (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Unless we believe this we will never have reason to believe it is true. If you receive a letter from the President of the country, but believe it came from somebody else, it is not going to mean very much to you. Without the confidence that the Bible is the Word of God there will be little motive to investigate it, apply it, believe it, or even respect it. Nobody will respect personal responsibility to its demands if they have doubts about its origin and whether it really came from God.

To read from idle curiosity, to find fault, to search for alleged flaws, rather than respect it for what it claims to be will cloud the mind and understanding will escape us. That the Scriptures are inspired of God can be demonstrated with a study of the evidences. We do not here present those evidences, but only take note of the need to respect the Word for what it claims.

### **Effort**

Mental industry is essential to proper understanding. So many want something easily poured in rather than anything that takes effort to dig out. Mental exertion seems to be too much for some people. They had rather die and go to hell than exert effort. Gaining understanding of the Bible, like other subjects, requires study. "*Study to show thyself approved unto God...*" is Paul's admonition in Second Timothy 2:15. An occasional,

haphazard, irregular, brief scanning of the Bible will profit little. It does take intense study and meditation, regularly done, continuously, over long spans of time. Too many are too mentally lazy to go to heaven. They will not use their minds and study the Bible. Others are mentally alert and active but rather study other things to the neglect of the Bible and then sometimes wonder why they seem to have such a flimsy grasp of the Bible. Mental exertion is more difficult, taxing, tiring and exhausting than physical exertion when compared on a time basis. The unwillingness to apply oneself mentally will deprive us of needed understanding.

We urge that each one try to set a time, however brief, for regular, sincere, daily, respectful study, even if only a passage or two. Take advantage of classes, sermons, books and investigate. The effort is more than rewarded as the light of truth dawns around you. Your knowledge and understanding will expand.

### **Sincerity**

There should be purity of mind by which we mean a sincerity. Luke 8:15, *"But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."* A mind given over to sin, that attaches a "double meaning" to everything they read, that seeks the unchaste, sensual and evil of this world will not likely explore the revelation of God honestly. Rather, they, if they consider it at all, will project their own evil to everything they read, giving a slanted and distorted picture to what God tells us. The carnal corruption in the mind of many prevents a grasp of the purity of truth. It is possible for one to become so hardened in sin that even the truth of God cannot make an impression.

### **Helps**

There are invaluable aids and helps in Bible study, such as Bible dictionaries, concordances, commentaries by faithful brethren, and sermon books that help us cultivate a hunger and thirst for righteousness. A good education helps. Knowledge of language, grammar, meaning of words, an enlarged vocabulary, will all assist us. Knowledge of history, logic, geography, customs and similar things give us better opportunity to come to an understanding of the Biblical message. Many parables simply could not be understood without such information about the

times, practices, and customs of the period under consideration.

Young people as well as older ought to be encouraged to go forward with their educational processes so they can be better teachers, preachers, parents, elders, deacons, people of service to those around them. They will not only produce more materially that can be used to further the cause of Christ, but they will make more productive citizens, be brighter lights in the world of darkness, know how to make intelligent decisions, and be better able to assist other people in problems that arise in life. We would not wish to leave the impression that secular education is the answer to man's ills. This we do not believe, and forthrightly would deny. We are simply suggesting that a good education along the lines mentioned will help us to investigate the Bible more intelligently. We are also aware of the danger and destruction a skeptical education is in understanding God's truth. Nor does one have to be a professor of degrees to be able to know and understand what God wants.

We wish to emphasize that by no means would we indicate that one without a formal secular education, or who has not been advanced in schools, cannot learn the truth and be a Christian and go to heaven when he dies. It simply means that an educated person is better equipped to do the mental exercise that is required to come to an understanding of Scripture, generally speaking. There will be exceptions. Some with many degrees are far from understanding. One who cannot even read and write can understand when taught. But without the basic skills to investigate and comprehend one is handicapped. Education of the right sort is a blessing. Education that makes a man think he has graduated to be a god will damn his soul.

Do we really want understanding? Are we sincere in that desire? Do we pray that God help us? Are we doing our part? Let us put ourselves wholly to the task. Paul prayed, *"That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints."* (Ephesians 1:18).

† † † † †

# ***Hate***

We begin this lesson with the definition of hate as is found in the dictionary and as people generally think of it. Hate, as a verb, is to dislike intensely, abhor, detest, entertain a continued hostility toward someone or something. Hate is an attitude of heart that seeks to hurt and harm. Most people think of hatred as something altogether evil. They will say, "It is wrong to hate." But to hate does not always classify one as evil, and hating is not always evil. There are certain things we are supposed to hate.

Hatred is wrong when it is directed against that which is supposed to be loved. Whether hate is right or wrong depends, then, on the object of that hate. In this respect it is much like its opposite which is love. It is not right to love everything. A person can hate situations, circumstances, ideas, truth, people God, sin, and what he hates determines whether his hatred is detrimental or beneficial. Anything that can be loved can also be hated. Anyone capable of loving is also capable of hating.

Hate, again like its opposite, love, is in the heart of a person. You do not see hate just as you do not see love. You can see the manifestations of both, the evidences of the existence of them. Hate and love either one can actually exist before it manifests itself. But it usually "comes out." Just as love will demand a demonstration of itself to please God, by our obedience (John 14:15; 15:14; First John 5:3), hate will show itself in the way we act toward various objects and people.

## **Not To Hate Others**

We should never hate our fellowman whether he is a Christian or not. This kind of hatred is what we often consider first when discussing this subject. But God loved the world (John 3:16), and so should we. Jesus loved all mankind and so should we. We are not justified in hating souls. Rather, we have an obligation to all men to preach the truth to them about the love of Christ so hatred can be dissolved from the hearts of all. Jesus hated sin but He always loved the sinner and even died that sinners might be saved.

Hatred of others has a way of backfiring and destroying the one who hates. In the book of Esther we read of Haman who hated Mordecai and plotted ways to kill him. But the man who

died on the gallows Haman prepared for Mordecai was Haman himself. Hate is like a spiritual cancer that gnaws at the spirit of man until he is spiritually impoverished.

Hating other people is one of the fundamental problems of our world. Paul described the condition of sinful man in Titus 3:3 as *"hating, and hating one another."* Those who hate others are in darkness (First John 2:9-11). To hate another is as sinful as murder (First John 3:15). One cannot hate his brother and claim to love God (First John 4:20,21). Hatred toward another will cause us to say and do things that will damn us (Matthew 5:21,22).

### **Not To Hate God**

We should never hate God. In Romans 1 Paul wrote that those who hate God are given unto a reprobate, depraved mind, given to sin. When people, in defiance and arrogance, refuse to live a righteous life they are likely to display their hatred toward God. The greatest commandment is, *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."* (Matthew 22:37). Jesus added, *"The second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."* (Matthew 22:39).

What should be the Christian's attitude toward those who may hate them? This is not an uncommon situation. People can become your enemy if you tell them the truth (Galatians 4:16). Jesus said in John 15:18, *"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."* Matthew 10:22, *"And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake, but he that endureth to the end shall be saved."* Luke 6:22,23, *"Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in like manner did their fathers unto the prophets."* How we are to treat those who would hate us is expressed in Matthew 5:43-48, *"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth the rain on the just and on the unjust."*

*For if you love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if you salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect."*

Romans 12:20,21, *"Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."* We can deal with those who sin against us as Haman did toward one he considered an enemy, even though Mordecai never did him harm, or we can treat them as Joseph did his brothers and forgave them.

## **A Good Hatred**

All hatred is not evil. There are certain things that God hates. Proverbs 6:16-19, *"These six things doth the Lord hate; yea, seven are an abomination unto him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren."* What God hates we should also hate.

We learn that God hates every false way (Psalm 119:104). Understanding the precepts of God will lead us to hate every false way. We must, however, distinguish between hatred for the false ways and hatred for the doers of false ways. The first we are to hate. The second we must love. Even as we hate the evil ways some follow we can be compassionate and loving toward them in seeking their salvation. Did not Jesus do this very thing? Even when the church must discipline someone it is not motivated by hate of the person but love for the truth, love for the sinful one, love for those who remain faithful that could be misled if discipline is not carried forward. The Lord chastens those whom He loves (Hebrews 12:6).

Mankind has enough burdens in life without being bent with false ways. A way may seem right and be wrong (Proverbs 14:12). Doctrines and precepts of men make vain the worship toward God (Matthew 15:9). We must war against every false way and have no part in it (Ephesians 5:11), lest souls be overtaken in trespasses. We can make the Word of God of none effect by human traditions which people hold as opposed to God's will (Matthew 7:13).

The early Christians learned to hate sin in every form. Jude

20-23, *"But ye, beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh."* Romans 12:9, *"Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good."*

### **To Love Less**

The word "hate" is sometimes used in the Bible to mean to "love less." Luke 14:26, *"If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."* In Ephesians 6:2 Paul taught that we are to honor our parents, but in Luke we are taught to "hate" them. There is no contradiction because the word "hate" in Luke means to love less. It speaks of priority and first place in our devotion. Our loyalty must be to Christ before all else, even those nearest and dearest on earth. Even our own lives are not to be placed before the service to God. Matthew 10:37 uses the word "hate" in the same way.

This is a hard saying. Yet, it forms the only acceptable basis upon which we can serve God. Matthew 6:24 is another example of loving less as the meaning of hate. *"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."* We all have any number of authorities over us in life, in the home, business, school and society. The meaning is that we shall not place any authority superior to the authority of the Lord. That would be to serve the wrong master, and we cannot serve two at once with equal loyalty.

Anything we hate, and any time we hate, there ought to be love as the motivation for it. To hate for the sake of hating will profit nothing good. It will actually be harmful to everything and everyone. We must hate with the right motive and that motive must be love. We must love God, mankind, righteousness and the truth to the extent that we automatically learn to abhor that which is contrary to such things. It would seem that every Christian would desire to have it justly said of his life and attitude that he hated what God hates and he loved what God loves. It has been said about one person that he loved God so much that he hated whatever was offensive to God. This should be said of

all of us. Love for God is the motive for hating evil.

Our Savior has shown to us, by word and deed, how to hate and how to love, what to hate and what to love. May we learn of Him and partake of His ways, walking in His footsteps that will lead us into eternal glory in heaven.

† † † † †

## **God's Power Through Strange Victories**

Habakkuk 3:19, "*The Lord God is my strength...*" These words were written over twenty-seven centuries ago. It was not the first time such a confession had been made. David, Jeremiah, Isaiah and many other holy men of God since the creation recognized that truth. We need to recognize it also. Every nation would do well to realize that it is strong to the extent that the nation looks to and leans on God.

One need of mankind is someone strong on whom they can depend. Children lean on the strength of their parents. We are the children of God and we lean on our heavenly Father. Almighty God has supplied mankind what is needed. In and of himself man is incapable to live successfully. Even though some have tried, and some have even thought they have succeeded in living life without God, people fail to realize that life itself is from God. Whether one succeeds in life or not is not determined by how he fares in this life temporally, physically and materially, but how he will fare in the judgment and eternity. Jeremiah said, "*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.*" But man can and should trust in the strength and power of the Almighty Guide.

God expects many things of His creatures, but He never expects or requires that which is beyond man, with God's help, nor does He expect what is unreasonable. God has seen fit to provide mankind with evidences that sustain man's trust. He has shown His strength in many ways. We read of the creation and many other miraculous deeds, the power of His Word to convert people from what they were into what they should be. There are the laws of nature in operation which God set in motion that

demonstrate His power. He shows His ability through His providence. We want to consider the manifestation of the power of God as has been shown through various victories enjoyed by Israel over their enemies. These events show God's strength and man's weakness and dependence. Hopefully, this knowledge will motivate us to be more confident as we place our trust in Him as we live our lives before Him.

### **Deliverance From Egypt**

Consider the account of Israel leaving Pharaoh's slavery. At the completion of the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn throughout Egypt. Israel marched toward the Red Sea. Soon Pharaoh and Egypt recovered from the immediate impact of that plague and pursued Israel to either recapture them or destroy them. Either way, Israel was in danger.

Israel, fresh from captivity, was not equipped for war and were helpless before their enemies. There were mountains on either side of them and the sea in front of them, with Pharaoh coming behind them. How could they escape? They could not by their own power.

By the power of God in opening the sea they were spared. Walls of water stood on either side as they passed over on dry land. A wall of fire stood between them and their foes until they were safely on the other side. The victory provoked a gigantic celebration. But such could never have taken place except for the power of God. Alone, they would have been annihilated. Not only was that nation, but all nations, are indebted to the strength of God because of that event. Israel was spared and through Israel came the Christ.

### **Taking Jericho**

Forty years after crossing the Red Sea there was another crossing of water. This time it was the Jordan River even at flood stage. Once across there was another victory awaiting Israel because of the power of God. This was the taking of the city of Jericho. That city was walled and fortified. Israel's strength was not with her armies, but in faith in God.

A strange battle plan was delivered to Joshua. Israel was to march around the walls of the city one time each day for six days, and seven times on the seventh day. Then they were to blow their trumpets and shout. When they obeyed what God

instructed the walls fell and the city was exposed. It became easy prey for Israel. Obviously, Israel could not have captured the city without God's power. Even though what they did was essential, their obedience was not the power but only gave them benefit of God's power. This was another manifestation of the strength and power of God, the same God to whom we belong.

In the process of conquering Canaan there were many times when God's power was the difference between victory and defeat for Israel. One occasion was when Joshua defeated five kings while defending the city of Gibeon. Even though the Gibeonites had deceived Joshua into making a covenant with them which he should not have done, the covenant called for Joshua to protect the city and provide it with safety. The other Canaanite cities became aroused toward Gibeon because of their alliance with Israel and threatened it. When Gibeon sent word to Joshua for help, Joshua and his army quickly came to their aid.

In the battle that followed two expressions of God's power are evident. (1) The enemies fled in panic, and (2) more of the enemy were killed by hailstones than from the swords of Israel. Another display of God's power was when God slowed down the sun, which is spoken of as the sun standing still, giving Joshua almost a full day longer in which to carry the fight. Because of God, not because of Joshua and the army alone, the victory was won.

### **Amorites and Midianites**

Again, when Israel fought with two Amorite kings the victory belonged to Israel but it was because of God's strength. Joshua 24:12, *"And I have sent the hornet before you, which drove them out from before you, even the two kings of the Amorites; but not with thy sword, nor with thy bow."* God sent hornets into the midst of the Amorites. Being occupied with fighting the hornets, the Amorites were no match for Israel and they fled in defeat. This is another manifestation of God's power in the strange way victories were accomplished.

Nearly two hundred years after entering Canaan Israel was in servitude to the Midianites right in their own homeland. This was because of their failure to be faithful to God. But in their oppression they cried unto the Lord penitently and God sent a deliverer whose name was Gideon.

Gideon sent forth a call to arms and thirty-two thousand volunteered. Judges 7:2, *"And the Lord said unto Gideon, The*

*people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me."* God instructed Gideon to allow all who wished to return home and twenty-two thousand returned, leaving ten thousand. But God told Gideon that there were still too many and gave directions for a test to be made to determine who would return and who would stay. The test involved how the people would drink water from the stream. All but three hundred men were sent home.

What could three hundred men do against the Midianites whose number was like that of locusts, having camels without number, more like the sands of the seashore? But the whole matter was arranged by the Lord rather than man. Israel was more than equal to the task before them, but only because of the strength and power of God.

The Midianites were encircled at night by the three hundred men. At a given signal the men broke pitchers containing lighted torches, blew their trumpets and shouted. The Midianites were thrown into disarray, thinking they were surrounded by a powerful host of men, and they began striking out against each other in their confusion, killing, wounding and destroying themselves. Those who could fled. Once again the power of God had vanquished the enemies of His people. There is no question as to whom the credit for the victory belonged.

### **Two Prime Lessons**

What lessons do we learn? There are several we need to learn, but we shall emphasize just two. We realize these victories were due to the power of God. But we also cannot fail to see how people had to cooperate with God's directions. God expects man to follow where He leads. The benefits of God's strength were enjoyed when man realized he needed God and obeyed God. Israel had to march into the Red Sea. Joshua had to circle Jericho and enter the fray just as did Gideon. We learn that our God is a God of strength and power but let us not think that God supplies His power to us regardless of our attitude and response to His will. God's power and man's duty were both present in all these events we mentioned.

In the New Testament we have a statement by Paul regarding strength. *"I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me."* (Philippians 4:13). Paul would have been inaccurate to have written he could do all things and stopped there. That would

have revealed reliance totally on himself. He would have ignored the real source of power. But he added, “...in him that *strengtheneth me*,” with reference to Christ. He revealed a true understanding of strength. God has been and still is the source of power in every age. Christians today can say with the Israelites of old, “*The Lord God is my strength.*”

### **Illustration**

This illustration might assist us to see the thrust of the lesson and what our attitude should be. Some botanists were combing a mountainous area in Scotland and spotted a rare species of flower. But it was far down the side of a steep precipice. There was a small lad with them and they asked him to allow them to lower him down the side of the mountain by a rope to pluck the flower that they might study it. The boy refused in spite of rewards offered him. But then he suggested, “If my father holds the rope, I’ll do it.” The father was brought to the place, given the rope, and the boy went down the side unafraid and secured the flower as requested.

What is the moral here? The boy trusted his father and his father’s strength and knew how his father cared for him. He was not afraid as long as his father held the rope because he trusted his power.

The application is clear, is it not? We can have complete confidence in our heavenly Father. He “holds the rope,” so to speak, to our lives and spiritual security. But we must trust Him. When we do we shall be able to do what is expected of us without fear but with assurance and confidence.

Do we trust the power and strength of God? Each must ask and answer for himself. We have every reason to look to and lean on Almighty God.

† † † † †

### **ARTICLE: Strong Leadership Needed**

We begin this discussion with words of commendation for elderships who stand forthrightly for the doctrine of Christ regarding the relationship of the Christian to the world. Not all elders bow to pressures to compromise. Those that do bow are disgraceful, but those who uphold the truth are worthy of honor and respect. Thank God for those who love the truth and retreat

not from it.

While the world “*world*” has several meanings in Scripture, we have reference to the sins of the world, partaking of that which is forbidden by the will of Christ, the fleshly lusts and sensual thoughts and deeds that characterize the unholy and ungodly, the evil order and the pursuit thereof, the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19-21), the “*lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.*” (First John 2:16).

“*Friendship of the world is enmity with God.*” (James 4:4). Christians are in the world (in God’s creation and on earth), but not of the world (partakers of the sins of the world). We are a “*peculiar people,*” a distinctive people because of our “*denying ungodliness and worldly lusts.*” (Titus 2:12). Who could find a more specific directive than Romans 12:2? “*And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.*”

Unfortunately, not all members of the church in New Testament times lived accordingly, such as some in Corinth, Demas, and others. Not all who profess to be Christians today do any better. Within nearly every congregation can be found some who seem determined to keep one foot in the world as they try to maintain fellowship in the church. How they will swell with anger and venom should godly efforts be made to encourage them to conform to the way of Christ!

Some of the meanest and poison-tongued people on earth are the worldly members of the church. They have no limit to which they will not go to discredit those who uphold Christian teaching regarding worldliness. Their attacks on elders, preachers and brethren generally who contend for the faith in this realm are vicious. Attempts to intimidate elderships with rebellion, forced resignations, withholding contributions until all accept their worldly ways are but a few of their tactics. Dividing churches and alienating brethren has marked their trail. Cheerleading and beauty pageants are more important to them than God’s Word.

Before going to the extreme measures, however, they usually try to rationalize their worldly positions. They will defend social drinking with absurd arguments (Jesus made wine). They condone smoking (no worse than overeating). Parading in their slit shirts, shorts, bathing suits in mixed swimming (how short is short, as if short has no meaning), allowing their young men to wear long hair (how long is long, as if long means nothing),

attending proms, rock concerts, etc. (better than necking in the park); one ridiculous and foolish “mouthing” is raised after another. By this they reveal a worldly attitude and a contempt for the Christian standard of conduct. If elders allow the preacher to preach otherwise, they will pout, murmur, create disturbance and act hurt. Weak elders, wanting peace more than truth, sometimes cater to them and suggest the preacher “go easy.” When a solid and firm endorsement of sound words is in order, weak elders crawl away or express words of regret that the subject is preached, almost apologizing to the world that sin has been condemned. How such men consider themselves to be shepherds protecting the flock is beyond comprehension!

Elders could slow this rebellion down if they would. If they would cease to use the worldly members in public worship and teaching, if they would stand behind sound teaching and “*convict the gainsayer*,” (Titus 1:9), and lead the church, as they have oversight, in disciplinary action the Bible demands (Second Thessalonians 3:6), the lost would be better able to distinguish between a Bible people and “just another church of hypocrites.”

Elders feel the pressure of numbers, money, acceptance by the community. Because their children and grandchildren are involved in the sins of the world they often do a backflip on behalf of the devil. Some are so compromising and fearful that in some communities you could not tell a Christian from any other without a rollbook. Members use the same foul language, go to the same places, do the same things, have the same greedy ambitions, belong to the same drinking set at the club, gamble at the same table, laugh at the same dirty “jokes” as others. For all practical purposes, they show their disregard for Paul’s questions, “*Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*.” (Romans 6:1,2).

Patience ought to be extended toward the babe in Christ as he learns how to “*walk in the light*” (First John 1:7). But as often as not the real problems for elderships come from members who have been members a long time and who just defy the truth. Elderships need to realize what harm such people do to faithful Christians and to the cause of Christ when they tolerate such sinners to remain in fellowship as if it really does not matter.

“*Sound words... sound speech... sound doctrine*” (Second Timothy 1:13; Titus 1:9; 2:8), supported by faithful men is the only cure. May it be so with brethren everywhere. JWB



## **Say What You Mean**

There comes a time when a person who believes he has something worth believing and needs expression to learn how to say what he means without the ambiguity and confusion that characterizes the speech of far too many. Even some of the more educated among the brethren seem to have a great capacity of leaving it quite unclear just what it is they are teaching. It is not because they lack the mental capacity of the adequate vocabulary, but they lack the integrity to say what they really mean and what they really believe. They are too cowardly to be forthright in admitting where they stand on this issue or that, they still want the applause and company of those who take exception to what they believe, so they cloak their sentiments in language that leaves room for "interpretation." This usually means they leave themselves loopholes that allows them to deny what they really want to say but are afraid to say it out loud. If questioned they readily run to the favorite expression of unsound men, "You misunderstood me." Many brethren are no longer considered sound and distinctive in their speech because they simply do not say clearly what they mean.



**JAMES W. BOYD**

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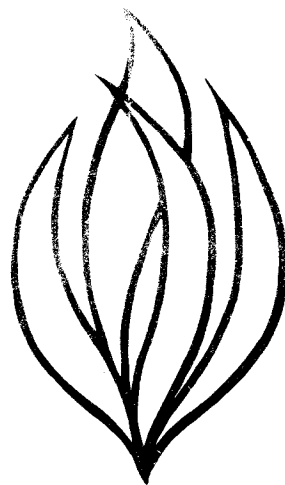
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# A Burning Fire



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

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# **Religious Unity**

*John 17:20-23, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they all may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."*

This is one of several fundamental passages stressing the Lord's intent that those who professed to be Christian would be united. Unity is the theme of what is called the Restoration Movement. There can be only one way to have religious unity, and that is for all men to subscribe to the revealed will of God and that alone, as that will is revealed in the New Testament without addition or subtraction.

It is rather popular to talk about unity, but more often than not what is really intended is merely union. There never has been a time when unity is more needed than now. In every subtle and overt way the faith of Jesus Christ is being undermined and skepticism spread through the schools, government, social organizations, and even by many religious groups. It is the fondest hope and holiest desire of a true Christian for there to be unity, but at the same time the very basis of Christianity is under vicious attack. There is the desperate need for the defense of the gospel. The outcome of the "battle for the Bible" is very much in doubt for modern man, including the very next generation which includes our children. It is past time that true Christians be aroused, see the digressive direction we are drifting, learn our weakness, and rally our forces and recognize the value, the necessity, of unity.

## **Division Admitted**

The call for unity takes note that there is division. There is division between religions, division among those who profess to follow Christ, and even division among those who have obeyed the gospel. We hear today voices echoing the same compromising themes of yesteryear saying, "We claim to be

Christian only, but not the only Christians.” This is said, not with adequate explanation, but to introduce the idea that one can be acceptable to God with something short of following Christ as the Bible teaches. Statements similar to the following are being made, “We should not assume that those with whom we regularly commune are the only Christians in the world.” Certainly, there are other Christians in congregations other than the one to which we belong. There may even be some who have become Christians and have left the faith and gone into various paths of religious and anti-religious error. But to leave the idea in the minds of people that there are “knowledgeable and faithful Christians” in most any of the various religious groups that claim to be Christian is as false as a three dollar bill. Unless one hears the word, believes it, repents of his sins, confesses Christ, and is buried in water in the name of Christ for the remission of sins, thereby reaching the saving blood of Christ, he is not a Christian. Unless one who has obeyed continues in faithfulness as a Christian he is not among the saved, but has renounced his salvation and returned to the sin that will destroy him. This we must preach without fear or favor because that is what the Bible teaches.

### **Promoters Of Unity And Division**

True Christians should work toward getting God’s people everywhere to stand together in faithfulness, and stand together in opposing all forces that are destroying the unity of the church, either from within or without. Only genuine unity will grant the church the strength it needs to preach the gospel to the world. The hopelessly divided religious condition of our society drains the influence of true New Testament Christianity, depletes it of money, energy, and work that needs to be directed toward saving the lost.

Those who have promoted denominationalism through the years have the unenviable future of facing God, having promoted division, while the Son of God prayed for unity. Those in the church who have promoted their opinions as the law of God, or loosed the law of God to accomodate the worldly and wicked in the church, also face a day of retribution. The only justified cause to promote is true New Testament Christianity. Error and sin divide. It is not sinful to fight the error, even if that provokes division, because it is the error that is the real cause, not the truth.

Many religious people have even been led to believe that religious division has some redeeming features. One prominent denominational evangelist was heard to say that religious division and the many denominations give people a choice of ways they wish to serve God. What man might want is not our goal. What God directs is all that matters. God has not given us a choice how to serve Him. We either serve Him His way or we are in error. It matters not what we like or dislike. What matters is, "What does God teach and expect of us?" Until this disposition abides there will continue to be division. There is no Scriptural justification for what the world now sees; denominationalism, and the tearing asunder of the true body of Christ with the borrowings from theologians, creeds, manuals, catechisms, disciplines, prayer books, "scholars," confessionals, and the like.

### **Wrested Passage**

Some have recklessly applied John 15:1-6, the parable of the vine and the branches, as Biblical support for different denominations. But the branches are not denominations, but people. "*If a man abide not in me...*" Nothing in Scripture even resembles the acceptance of denominationalism. How could the Lord address what did not exist? Why should the Lord pray for unity and then condone division?

The evidence of the destruction of religious division is abundant. Division creates confusion, divides home to the point that Jesus cannot even be discussed. The religion of Christ may cause division with some accepting Him and others rejecting Him. But the harm is in the rejection.

Division is a waste of manpower, money, influence, and talents. It opens the door for human doctrines, pride, jealousies, strife, and bitter religious battles. Sons and daughters do not follow with mother because of father, nor will they follow father because of mother, not will they follow Christ because of them both, but they will follow the devil to hell. We could exhaust our space with the destructive elements of division simple being recounted, let alone analyzed.

### **"Unity In Diversity"**

There is a difference between unity and union. Union contends that we should simple "agree to disagree." Is that what existed between the Father and the Son? Unity blends together

things of the same kind. Union places things of different kinds in the same company. The Father and the Son were united, but you can put dogs and cats in a sack and have union, but a far cry from unity. The United Nations is union, but not unity. That for which Christ prayed, and the apostles taught, was not an amalgamation of different types, kinds, and mixtures. They worked for likeness. Union can be achieved without agreement on truth, but unity demands being of the same mind, same doctrine, same judgment, same practice, which demands using the same standard.

Note the Lord's prayer. He prayed that the Father might glorify Him. Then He prayed for His disciples. He even prayed for unity among His followers down through the ages, *"that they all may be one."* The oneness is to be like the oneness of Him and the Father, one in sentiment, purpose, spirit, action, conviction, and goal. He prayed that He, the Father, and His disciples, would be united.

### **Why Unity**

The reason He prayed for unity was, *"That the world may believe that thou didst send me."* Whether we want to admit it or not, the division that exists among those professing to be Christians does more to cultivate the ground for the rejection of Christ than most anything else we can perpetuate. Jesus knew that and prayed for unity. One of the most powerful weapons in the devil's arsenal against Christ is the disunity among professed followers of Christ. The only way to deprive Satan of this vicious tool is for men to set aside the ways of men that divide and conform to the way of God that unites.

John 10:16, *"And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."* Few quarrel that we have the One Shepherd, Jesus Christ. We wonder why there is any doubt that there should be one fold. Jesus was speaking of both Jews and Gentiles, heretofore religiously divided, being united in the fold of which He is Shepherd. Contrast this statement of the Lord with the attitude that allows for division, and the situation that permits there to be hundreds of folds. How can anyone claim to have respect for Christ and endorse the very opposite of His teaching and prayers?

First Corinthians 10:16,17, *"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread*

*which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread."*

Romans 12:4,5, *"For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."*

Ephesians 4:4-6, *"There is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."*

The body is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23; Colossians 1:18). There is only one body, one church, one faith, one baptism, just as surely as there is one Lord, one hope, and one Father. In view of such teaching, how does anyone take comfort in the existence of religious division?

First Corinthians 1:10, *"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."*

## **No Right To Divide**

There was no right for those who professed to be Christians to be identifying themselves by Peter, Paul, or Apollos. Nor is there any reason for those who profess to follow Christ today to be identifying themselves by names of men, doctrines, governmental systems, or any other such thing. Why cannot people be content with the name God called His people under Christ, and that is the name Christian (Acts 11:26; 26:28; First Peter 4:16)?

The Bible claims to be the inspired, infallible, inerrant, all sufficient, and authoritative Word of God (Second Timothy 3:16,17). The Bible student is aware how the Bible forbids adding to and taking from the Word of God. Therefore, the Bible is the sole authority in matters religious, and until men accept that, there is no possibility of unity.

Unity is possible, even though unlikely, because Christ prayed that we be united. He would not have prayed for what He did not want, nor what could not be achieved if men would cooperate with His will.

## **Attitude Involved**

What is your attitude toward unity? Does anything go with you? Are you willing to conclude that "unity in diversity" is really the unity the Lord prayed would exist? Does it matter to you the waste and destruction of religious division? If anyone thinks those with whom he communes are not true New Testament Christians, and that others need not be like them, then, if he is honest, he will work to dissolve his communion and dismiss his group, and align himself with others who are "just as well off." What right would any group have to exist that did not believe they were right? Does being right matter with you? Does being wrong concern you? Can it be that Jesus lived, died, came from the tomb, ascended into heaven, having prayed for unity, and then it not really matter after all?

We can be united. But our unity with Christ is far more important than unity with men. Faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins will unite us spiritually with Deity. It will unite us with all others who have done the same thing, and as we "*walk in the light as He is in the light*," we will maintain that unity. Should any forsake the path of truth and depart into other paths, the unity is shattered, and can only be restored by those who broke it returning to the truth which they left, repenting, confessing their sins, and praying to God for their restoration with Him and those they forsook.

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## **OBEDIENCE IS A "MUST"**

Jesus closed the Sermon on the Mount by saying, "*Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man...*" He followed that with, "*And every one that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man...*"

The eventual consequences to the wise and foolish man when the rains came and the winds blew makes it obvious which the Lord desires us to be. Do not these words of our Lord show to us just how absolutely necessary it is for us to be governed by what He has taught? Are we not expected to reduce what He has instructed into practice? Is it reasonable to expect His salvation if we do not obey His voice?

# ***Evolution Or The Dignity of Man***

The subject is intended to offer a choice between two positions that cannot be reconciled. We can either accept or reject the doctrine of evolution or accept or reject the doctrine that man has a distinct dignity by virtue of being created after the image of God. We shall contend that it is impossible to accept both doctrines. To accept evolution one must reject the idea that man is essentially different from animals. If that be true, there is no reason to elevate man above the level of beasts but only consider him a more highly evolved beast than others. However, if one rejects evolution, he allows that there is a difference between mankind and the animal kingdom that provides man a distinct dignity above them.

Evolution, being widely taught as a proven scientific fact, is being disputed legally, scientifically, ethically, socially, and religiously. Evolution is offered as an explanation for man's existence. But that it is a proven fact is a vicious and intellectually dishonest lie. Regardless of how sincere an evolutionist may be, he believes a lie.

## **What Scripture Teaches**

One may not believe the Bible, but it cannot be denied that the Bible teaches that man has been created in God's image. Genesis 1:26,27, *"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them."* Genesis 2:7, *"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."*

Psalms 8:3-8, *"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honor. Thou*

*madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas."*

All through the Bible the emphasis is that man is different from any and every other creature, superior because there is a dignity about a human being. He has that spark from Deity the Bible calls the soul or spirit. It is spiritually that man is like God for God is a Spirit (John 4:24). Acts 17:28, "*For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.*" The essential nature of man demands uniqueness not shared by any other of God's creatures. Whether one believes the Bible or not, one is forced to admit that the Bible teaches the dignity of man and evolution reduces him to animal level.

### **Basis Of Our Way Of Life**

This Biblical view of man is the basis for much of our way of life, a way that many wish to destroy. Evolution is a tool for destroying this basic concept of man and pave the way to introduce an entirely new social order that is secular and God-denying. Our nation's Constitution was based on the doctrine that man has certain "inalienable rights" by virtue of being human. Animals have no such rights. Thousands of animals are fattened and killed for food every day, but there is no protest. But one murder of a human being can arouse the entire nation to righteous anger. If evolution is true, there is no reason to think human life is any more sacred than that of any animal. Why do we consider human life sacred, except from the influence of the Bible?

There was a time in our own land when people were bred, sold, bought, and treated as if they were mere animals. Then came that moment in our history when good men could tolerate this abuse no longer. People were freed from slavery because it was realized that regardless of race, creed, color, or other such distinctions, people have rights simply because they are of the human race. While in many instances practice has not caught up with doctrine, the principle of man being distinctive from the beast is well established. But it exists in spite of evolution, not because of it.

Various systems from Rome to Communism consist of man being nothing but an animal, with human life expendable. It is

characteristic of godless communism to slaughter people, casting out the unwanted, exterminating the aged and handicapped. It was nothing to barbaric Naziism to murder several million Jews. Communism has innocent blood pouring from its hands today. Evolution prepares the mind for such as that because it contends man is just a highly developed animal. Nations influenced sufficiently by the way of God believe in the supreme value of human life because man is in God's image. Destroy that concept and the floodgates of terror are wide open.

### **A Destroyer**

Evolutionists are among the worst traitors to civilization. It is subscribed by atheists who deny God, which the Bible calls fools. Denying the work of God, they deny the dignity of man. This is not a new idea, but one that presently receives tremendous propagation in the world today by the so-called scholars and educators of the world. But the Encyclopedia Brittanica calls the doctrine a "theory," not a proven fact. That life has come from non-life is neither scientific, logical, nor rational. But without going into the areas of disproving evolution, we are concerned here with the destruction of the theory to the dignity of mankind.

Crime, vice, war, and all such things are outgrowths of the idea that people are expendable, whether done by religious or irreligious people. Can evolution make people more considerate or moral, kind, law-abiding, or just the opposite? Can there be named one beneficial contribution to the uplifting of mankind that this theory has contributed? How can one train a person aright when people are equated to mere animals? What motive is there to be better? Animals have no morals, ethics, respect for right and wrong, nor do they have any reason to have them. If man is but an animal, anything that suits oneself must be considered acceptable. Nothing but rampant anarchy would exist if every man could "do his own thing" without moral restraint and guidance. Without God, and evolution demands there is no God, there is no authoritative principle against murder, theft, lying, or any other action civilized people define as crime. While evolutionists contend there is no God, few, if any, are willing to have society adopt the consequences of their doctrine.

The cold and bitter truth is, if evolution is true, there is no reason not to be utilitarian and dispose of anyone considered

objectionable, killing the handicapped, aged, malformed, or sick. We shoot animals when they are diseased or injured. Why not a human being? If evolution was true, there would be nothing noble or honorable that could be sustained. Who would and could say what was noble or honorable? To believe evolution you must deny everything holy and right.

### **Absolutely No Compromise**

There are those who try to compromise evolution and belief in God. Their position is called "theistic evolution." They claim that God exists and that He used the evolutionary process to bring mankind into being. They deny the Biblical record of spontaneous creation, instantaneous creation.

There is no need or justification to reconcile to doctrines that are so opposite to each other. Science does not demand it, nor does the Bible allow it. We do not have to deny one proven scientific fact to accept the Bible record that God created man, fullgrown, instantaneously, implanting within him a spirit in the image of the Creator. To contend for "theistic evolution" is to reduce the Genesis record to a myth rather than the historical record it claims to be. It makes the entire Bible suspect.

But we ask the theistic evolutionists: (1) If God used evolution to make man, at what point in man's development did he become a man and acquire a soul? (2) If evolution has occurred, what is to prevent man from developing into something else later? (3) What happens to the soul of man? (4) If man has a soul, which you admit, was it not given by a miracle by the Lord? (5) If God can perform such miracles, why could He not have created man as the Bible teaches? (6) If God allowed man to evolve from a "blob" and from a one-celled creature, why could not God, who had to have made the "blob," have created man full grown? (7) How do you account for the fact that evolution contradicts scientific findings and evidence? The truth is, it is foolish to speak of "theistic evolution" when there is no proof that evolution of the kind evolutionists teach has ever occurred anyway.

### **Evolution or God**

The theistic evolutionist is a most inconsistent and compromising fellow. One admits the existence of God. But once that admission is made, he tries to deny what God has said that He

did. Once you admit the existence of God, you surrender your argument against creation. To deny the miraculous power of God is to deny God. To deny His record is to deny His truthfulness. The theistic evolutionist tried to ride two horses going in opposite directions at the same time.

Some cry, "But many theologians accept theistic evolution!" Theologians through the ages have accepted most anything. Especially will they accept whatever they wish when they wish to be "scholarly" and please the world. The Bible is the authority, not some seminary trained, anti-Bible, conceited, compromising theologian.

Theistic evolution is an attempt to harmonise theories arising from science, such as geology, biology, etc., when no reconciliation is really needed. Proven science is not at odds with the creation account. Evolution is that which contradicts science.

To assert that evolution is a theory, a hypothesis, is one thing. To assert that it is a proven fact is to distort the truth unmercifully.

### **True Evolution**

There is a sense in which evolution is true and we have no hesitancy in admitting it. There are various divisions of creature life. There are changes that occur within these divisions. For instance, man is born and evolves or changes from infancy to childhood, to youth to adulthood. But this is not the "evolution" being propagated and to which we object. There is no evidence that there are changes from one division to another. As the Bible has taught that each produces after its own kind, in both the animal and vegetable world, so science has verified. Dr. A. H. Clark, a scholar of the Smithsonian Institute said, "No matter how far back we go in the trace of any animal forms which are intermediate between the various major groups or phyla...The greatest groups of animal life do not merge into one another. They are and have been fixed from the beginning. No animals are known even from the earliest rocks which cannot at once be assigned to their proper phylum or major group...There can be only one interpretation of this entire lack of any intermediate between the major groups of animals. If we are willing to accept the facts at their face value we must believe that there were no such intermediates, in other words, that these major groups from the very first bore the same relation to each other that they

do at the present day.” (Geology and the Bible, *Modern Science and Christian Faith*, page 35).

The “fairy tale” that evolutionists like to tell is that all modern scientists accept evolution is a deliberate lie. More and more who have believed it are having second thoughts about it because the evidence runs against it.

### **Cannot Have Both**

The evolutionists and the believer of the Bible both begin with presuppositions. Evolution denies the possibility of the supernatural because God is denied. The Christian admits the possibility of the supernatural. The evidence shows the Christian view to be logical, reasonable, beneficial, and harmonious with what can be tested and proven. We need not retreat one inch before the bombardments of the evolutionists that God created the world in six days and created man in His own image, thereby granting man dominion and dignity that pertains to nothing else He created.

Furthermore, the Biblical concept of mankind upgrades human kind, giving basis and reason for proper conduct toward each other. Evolution threatens to destroy all grounds for civilized human conduct. The two doctrines cannot be harmonized and there is no justifiable reason to attempt reconciling them. We can believe the Bible with confidence. We can know of the dignity of humanity because there is a God in heaven.

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**The Episcopal Church** does not respect the Scriptures as is evident by their religious forms, doctrines and practices. But there is an element within that church that now calls for accepting homosexuality as permissible, pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relationships are also said to be acceptable. The reason for this position is because “times have changed.” We are as aware as the next person that times have changed. But God’s law has not changed. The Bible still teaches such is sin.

One advocate of the liberalization of these matters says that since the church blesses dogs in a fox hunt they ought to look with favor upon “meaningful” human relationships. The truth is, the Episcopal church has gone to the dogs in many matters.

# ***Present Day Illumination Of The Spirit***

What does it mean to illuminate? It means to enlighten, inform, bring light where there is darkness, reveal what has not been revealed, give information that permits understanding. We contend that there is illumination by the Holy Spirit today, but not as some think.

Before Jesus was crucified He outlined the work of the Holy Spirit in John 14,15,16 when speaking to the apostles. He promised to send them the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit involved them and their preaching. The Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment, guiding the apostles in all the truth, bringing to their remembrance what He had taught them, all in order to glorify Christ. This was a promise, not to all, but to the apostles. It was a promise that the Lord kept beginning at Pentecost. That day the Holy Spirit came upon the apostles and they spoke as the Spirit guided. If this promise was not fulfilled to them then Christ broke His Word. But the Scripture affirms that total truth, once a mystery, has been revealed and we have the full revelation of God's will to man during the lifetime of the apostles.

## **The Bible**

The Biblical evidence of this truth is in Acts 20:27 where Paul said he preached the whole counsel of God. Jude 3 teaches Christians to contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. Galatians 1:6-9 pronounces God curse on those who teach differently from what the apostles taught. Second Peter 1:3 affirms they received all things that pertain to life and godliness. Second Timothy 3:16,17 says the Scripture furnishes us all things. First Corinthians 13:10 says miracles were to last until that which is perfect is come, meaning the full revelation of truth. Ephesians 3:3-5, Paul had the "*mystery*" revealed to him, he wrote it down by the Spirit, and one can read and understand what is now revealed although once unrevealed. Psalm 119:105 says "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my pathway.*"

Mankind is illuminated by the Holy Spirit today by and

through the revealed, verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient Word of God, the Bible.

### **Men Say**

But there is much dissatisfaction among men with the Bible. They resent being confined to the Word of God in the Bible. They want more from God; something additional and different. Therefore, some claim revelations, illuminations since the "*perfect law of liberty*" was revealed. Some religions are based almost entirely on the claims of latter-day revelations and continuous unfolding of additional and different truths since the Bible. Some claim to hold the Scriptures alongside their claimed new revelations. But this is impossible as the Bible itself teaches. Various individuals and churches claim visions, dreams, revelations special from what anyone else ever receives from God.

Many on the "electronic church" and the television personalities make such claims. For instance, Pat Robinson of the 700 Club constantly claims God is telling him something nobody else ever hears. He says God is healing somebody somewhere, here and there, he feels it, he knows it. He preaches a health and wealth message.

Jim Baker of the PTL Club once claimed to heal everybody on the top floor of an Atlanta hospital. Funny thing, however, nobody at the hospital ever knew anything about it. When that healing took place Baker shouted that the Holy Spirit had outdone Himself. Baker also once claimed to have received a special message from God right during his program (I was watching), and following a commercial he revealed what God had said. God told him that this was a special good time to ask for donations.

Oral Roberts once claimed to have seen a 900 foot Jesus rising above his hospital. (Wonder why there is a need of a hospital since Roberts claims to be a miracle worker and can heal everything from gout to cancer.) At this writing he recently claimed God would take his life if he did not raise four and one half million dollars for his projects. He has millions from naive, gullible, Biblically ignorant people. I have visited his crusades and know first hand of his vicious deception. I have talked with those he "healed." He is a colossal fraud.

Mary Baker Eddy, founder of Christian Science, claimed special revelation and founded that religious movement on such

things.

### **Other Claims**

The Mormon Church stands on the claimed special latter-day revelation of Joseph Smith. The president of the Mormon Church still claims to receive messages from God. If that be true, one can never really know if the message of the Mormons who come to your house is true or not because their message is subject to change as God speaks to their president. It is not surprising that Smith wrote disparagingly of the Bible and that Mormons use the Bible only as an entrance to get into homes to propagate their religious lies.

Ellen G. White, founder of Seventh-Day Adventism, claimed special revelations about the Sabbath. They believe in continuous revelation, as do Jehovah's Witnesses. The Catholic Church is built on special claims of special revelations. The doctrine of Calvinism demands that there be special operations of the Holy Spirit separate and apart from the Word of God. Baptists are strong Calvinists. One Primitive Baptist preacher told me when they assemble they have not studied but wait unto the Spirit moves them. Once during a campaign against alcoholic beverages he claimed God told him to have a big rally in the city auditorium, but from some experience I warned against such a rally lest it flop because of rain, and the facility being too large, the liquor people would gain rather than lose from such an event. He later agreed. I just had to ask him why he took my word over that of his special revelation. Baptists claim that what they happen to think of has been placed there by the Holy Spirit. They are honest and sincere, but have no understanding of the illumination of the Spirit.

Lynn Anderson, preacher at the Highland Church of Christ in Abilene, openly prayed that God would enlighten the Word as if the Bible was a dead letter on its pages and needed a push from the Spirit. Pat Boone said one cannot understand the Bible until you have the Spirit's experience. He said once it happens to you you will know it. There are some teaching in colleges operated by members of the church of Christ who hold to the same or similar false views.

There was a woman evangelist in Jackson, Tennessee who told me she talked with God nearly everyday like Moses and God talked at the burning bush. She was unable to give me even one single direct quotation from the Lord's mouth,

however. In Memphis, over television, a Baptist preacher claimed to be as inspired by the Holy Spirit and to the same degree as the apostles. Don Finto, of the once Belmont Church of Christ, said over television that what he was saying was no longer Don Finto but "I was God in Don Finto." A visitor to my office once came asking for help to restore his marriage. His problem arose because his wife claimed God told her to move to California. She did, leaving her husband and family.

Feelings, nudges, special instructions on what to preach, where to preach, where to park the car, what to say, seeking signs from God, this is what one hears repeatedly today. People who study these matters could add instance after instance to what I have said.

### **Answer The Question**

The unanswered and unanswerable question is, "If God is speaking to all these people as they claim, why do they not speak alike, speak the same things, teach the same messages? Why are they still divided? Is the Holy Spirit sending contradictory messages? Is He inconsistent with the very Scripture He gave? Or are the claimants deceived or just flat out lying?" Jimmy Swygart denies Oral Roberts heard God tell him he would die unless monies were raised. But why should we believe Jimmy any more than Oral? Both claim the Holy Spirit guides them! Ephesians 4:4,5 teaches there is "*one faith*." Men of faith who subscribe to "*the faith*" are willing to take God's Word and take God at His Word without demanding, claiming, or advocating something more, less, special and different.

In Luke 16, we read where the rich man in torment wanted Abraham to arrange for his brothers to receive God's warning in some special manner. Abraham's answer was that they had Moses and the prophets. Let them hear what God has already revealed. But many want something more and their desire for something more leads them to claim something more.

Deity illuminates through the gospel (First Corinthians 2:13). We are told to speak as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11). We shall be judged by the Word of Christ (John 12:48) and His Word is in the inspired Scriptures.

### **What Is Lacking?**

I am motivated to ask, What if God did actually give

somebody a special revelation? What would it accomplish? What would be the purpose of it?" Would it change His Word somehow? If so, this denies First Peter 1:25 that says His Word will endure forever. Will it add to it or take from it? If so, it violates all the many passages that condemn doing that very thing. Will it reveal truth thus far withheld from man? If so, Jesus did not keep His promise to the apostles. Will it give us inspired interpretation of the Scriptures? If so, having given us the Bible which we could not understand without inspired interpretation, would He have to give us another inspired interpretation to help us understand His inspired interpretation? Could not God provide adequate revelation from the first? He said He would and did. I believe Him. If He could not, can we be sure He can now? If He did not, why does He hold man responsible?

Finally, what evidence is presented by these who claim their special revelations to verify that they have received what they claim? The apostles performed miraculous works to prove they were speaking from God. They confirmed the Word in that manner (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3,4). Their miracles were real, verified, even not denied by their enemies because their enemies were confounded by them. They made the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk, the dead to rise. They struck people blind, were unharmed by vipers who bit them. Their healings were instantaneous and complete. They were not involved in some psychosomatically caused problem that can be corrected under the influence of hyperemotionalism. Those who claim such powers today do not do what was done by those of the first century as recorded in Scripture.

Where goes the claim must go the demonstration. The demonstration is lacking. Such claimants are false teachers and false prophets teaching false doctrine. They are people who are malcontent with the Word of God and deceive millions, raking in millions of dollars into their coffers. We are not left in darkness regarding the will of God. The Word lights, illuminates, leads, guides, directs, converts and sustains. By and through the Word the Holy Spirit operates, not apart from it. Thank God for His grace and mercy in His inspired revelation, the Scriptures!

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**It is heresy to act contrary to the example of Christ. To infringe on His law is a crime of extreme magnitude. Why do frail men presume to do it?**

# ***The Work Of An Evangelist***

Many preachers, possibly most, are reluctant to preach lessons that concern him so personally as this one. It is not because they have not studied the subject because they probably have spent as much time with it as any other. But his motives can be so easily impugned that he does so for his personal benefit. But it is a Bible subject that needs to be preached. How else can members of the church understand unless they are taught?

A preacher who preaches on the work of an evangelist is probably more qualified to preach on it than any listener he will ever have. He should be because it directly concerns his work. Few realize the seriousness of preaching as much as those who have given their lives to it. It does involve your entire existence.

## **Not Just Another Job**

Being a preacher is not like other tasks men assume. Preachers do not punch time clocks, "go to work, come home from work." Their work is ever with them and they are thinking about it all the time. They never really leave it behind them, even for a little while. One cannot really grasp this factor until he tries to maintain a regular schedule of study and presentation of lessons. Furthermore, there is very little the preacher does that he can dismiss the fact that he is a preacher. Where he goes, what he says, what he does, what he buys, how he looks; anything that in anyway could affect his work as a preacher must be taken into consideration.

There are misconceptions about the work of a preacher and preachers have to share some of the blame for this because of their reluctance to teach on it. Let us begin by considering some things that are not the work of a preacher, even though many seem to think so.

## **What He Is Not**

It is not his place to rule the church. Attempts by the preacher to rule the church causes trouble. This is the duty of duly appointed, recognized, qualified men called elders or bishops.

The preacher has no authority by virtue of the fact he is a preacher. He, like the rest of the members, works under the oversight of the eldership. While his advice and counsel may be sought, and he can express himself as do others, he is neither a ruler of the church, nor a "policeman" to make the members do right. Even when there may not yet be elders, he is just another member, but one who happens to serve in a very special capacity.

The preacher is not a substitute for a working membership. Some seem to have the idea that when they secure a preacher that the work of the congregation is his to do and they no longer have work to do. His visits do not make other visits unnecessary. His work as a Christian does not replace anybody's work. He is to do his work, but every member still have his/her work. He is not a "glorified errand boy" for the congregation, although he is often pushed into this role. He should not even try to cover all the work by himself. It does concern him that much is left undone that needs to be done, but he cannot, and should not try, to do everything. He cannot be the instigator, promoter, pusher, planner, and coordinator of every program and effort of the church. He should cooperate as well as others, but too often he is expected to take the lead in everything from youth work, Bible classes, visitation, personal work, training, to caring for the lawn, keeping up with baptismal clothes, answering all correspondence, being a part-time janitor, or whatever else nobody else will do.

Once I was in the church building running a vacuum cleaner and a visitor walked in and asked what I was doing. I told him I was doing the work of an evangelist, which being interpreted is, whatever you cannot get anybody else to do. This is not as it should be.

### **Advising**

Part of his work may include what is called counseling. Problems that people encounter are often brought to him for solution. This may be because some consider his a "pastor" or because he has studied such things possibly more than many others. This is a work he does with mixed emotions. He is glad to be of help to anybody. But so often problems are brought to him that Solomon could probably not solve and he is supposed to "wave a wand" and suddenly everything will be all right. It does not work that way. He cannot accomplish anything without

cooperation. But many want easy solutions to problems they rebelliously and defiantly created over a period of years. So often, even after advice is given and Biblical instruction offered, his words go unheeded, and still he is criticized because he did not solve some problem.

As valuable as advising with others can be, this is not his primary work. Experience has taught me that unsolicited advice is seldom, if ever, heeded. Often, even solicited advice is cast aside. So many come with problems, not for solutions, but to find somebody to agree with the decisions they have already made and the conclusions they have drawn. It is unreasonable to expect the preacher, or even the eldership, to have all the answers to every question every time. We are talking about mere men, not angels or Deity. Many expect church leaders to be perfect in every respect. This is why preachers have to be so careful about everything they say and do. While we should try to demonstrate what is preached, realistically every human being must say, "Do as I say and not as I do," because nobody is perfect except Christ. This double standard that many have regarding preachers and their families has driven many good men from the work of preaching because people expect more from them than they have a right to expect. This in no way minimizes the necessity of the preacher to live as consistently with the truth he preaches as he can. But does not every Christian have that same duty?

### **Who To Please**

The preacher must strive to please God, not men (Galatians 1:10). This introduces us to the work of a preacher from the positive side.

An evangelist is a "bringer or bearer of good tidings." He is to preach the gospel, the good news concerning Jesus Christ. Publicly, privately, as he has opportunity, this is his work. He may stay at a given locality for an indefinite time as a "located preacher," or he may go from place to place, but this is what he does. There are only two kinds of preachers: located or dislocated. Who wants to be a dislocated preacher?

God appreciates the work of preaching. First Corinthians 1:18,21, "*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God...For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to*

*save them that believe.*" Preaching the gospel is considered by some to be foolishness. But this is the way God has chosen to make His plan of salvation known to mankind.

Romans 10:13-15, *"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"*

### **God Wants Preaching**

If God is pleased with the work of preaching, that is all that really matters. Preachers must not attempt to please men, but God. This often brings him into conflict with those who would attempt to manipulate him to their satisfaction when his first loyalty is to the Lord.

Second Timothy 4:1,2,5, *"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom, preach the word; be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine...But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."* There it is in a nutshell. This work demands of the preacher great study, investigation, Biblical research, and nothing must be allowed to interfere with this number one priority. He is to use every responsible, Scriptural means he can to plant the seed of truth into the hearts of others.

He must be very careful of his message. Paul said, *"We preach Christ..."* Christ is the center of every sermon and lesson. If it were not for Him there would be no need for preaching. Even though Christ is offensive to many, preachers must preach Him. Truth often offends. It is not because Christ set out to be offensive, but because people love sin more than righteousness. Preachers know that many sermons may anger many people. But still he is derelict in his duty if he does not preach the "whole counsel of God."

### **The Seed And Soil**

What is frustrating is to realize that a lesson, the same lesson, will convert some, but make others angry and drive them away.

This is because of the “soil” into which he attempts to plant the “seed.” Even so, he must preach it as it is revealed in the Bible. Fortunate is the man that pleases men and God. But can such a one be found? It is not unlikely that those of whom nothing but good is said is one who soothes his hearers rather than teaching them all they should hear.

### **Whole Counsel**

To please God he must preach both the positive and the negative side of the gospel. While some smart under the pressure of the truth, and grow angry at the preacher for delivering that truth to their ears, still this is his work. Preachers are often criticized when he is doing his God-given duty by the very ones who ought to be “holding up his hands” and encouraging him in his faithfulness. Preachers like friends, respect kind words and encouragement as much as anyone. But he does not seek that at the high cost of compromising truth or soft pedaling the gospel to please men rather than God.

Is it not true that some sing the praises of a preacher when he proclaims truth they already accept? But what about those times he preaches the truth that “rubs them wrong”? Many in the church love to hear about faith, repentance, confession, and baptism, and well they should for this is God’s plan for saving man. But they will attempt to destroy the work and reputation of the preacher if he teaches against worldliness, commends the necessity of attendance at worship, or says and does anything that contradicts their prejudices, offends their business, or exposes their sins. Nothing is more slimy, repulsive, and unchristian than the attempt to undermine a preacher by picking him to death, belittling his work, and raising opposition to him because the truth he preaches runs counter to that person’s conduct and thought. Believe me, this is not an unusual response to truth that many preachers have suffered. He is often attacked in the most sneaky, underhanded, crude, rude, and back-biting fashion. If he is unwilling to “go along” with error or hold back some truth. God will not hold such servants of the devil guiltless.

### **A Shortage**

There is a shortage of preachers. There are far more who profess to be preachers than there are faithful gospel preachers.

But much of the shortage is due to the misunderstanding of the work of preachers. Young men are discouraged from preaching because they see the unfair double standards, impositions, and abuse heaped upon preachers who will not surrender to the whims of faithless men. Preachers have become second class citizens in the kingdom, unless they have some academic degree from some "clergy training system." There is not enough respect and support for those who know the book and will preach it faithfully. Many preachers are doing just exactly what God says preachers are to do, but many are so unfamiliar with Biblical teaching regarding preachers that they do not recognize his work as being what God wants. They want him to become everything for everybody. A wise preacher will not try to do that. It is commonplace for congregations to "fire the preacher, but keep their problems."

### **Duties To The Preacher**

Just as preachers have duties to God and their brethren, the brethren have duties to the preacher. This ought not be overlooked. Most preachers will exchange hours with most members and would gain them more leisure. Most will exchange pay with most members for preparation required, effort expended, insecurity endured, and abuse received. Most preachers persist in preaching because they love the truth, the souls of men, and in spite of obvious disadvantages in many ways, he appreciates the advantages and opportunities to serve God and his fellowman.

I am proud to be a preacher. God had but one Son and He was a preacher. There is no honest labor in which a human being can engage that is any more honorable or necessary than preaching the gospel. He should put his mind to the task, and brethren should support him in it.

### **Whosoever**

Whoever preaches to you, whenever or wherever, you better hope and pray that he is of the sort that will not compromise the truth or bow before pressures to alter it, water it down, or ignore it. You better pray he will teach you the "whole counsel" regardless of the cost to himself. You better hope he has the courage and conviction to stand for the right against whatever odds. Anything less than that could well blind your eyes to truth

you need and lead you into paths that will damn your soul. You better pray that the preacher sticks with *"thus saith the Lord"* and wavers not from it. You better expect him to withstand the inroads of error from whatever direction and/or source.

The preacher lives under the awesome warning of God to Ezekiel regarding the watchman (Ezekiel 33:1-9). He must be a watchman that will sound the trumpet clearly, distinctly, faithfully, and without compromise. Which kind of watchman do you really prefer? If you ever reach the point that you no longer want the full truth, then you have become like those Paul mentioned in Second Timothy 4:3,4, who want not sound doctrine but teachers who will tickle their ears.

There is no much more that can and ought to be said regarding this great work of preaching, both from the preacher's position and from the hearer's. But if these few words will accomplish some degree of respect for the Word, and those who proclaim it faithfully, then good will have been done.

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### **A Practice To Be Avoided**

"Give the devil his due!" is sometime heard. The idea is that even the devil can at times seemingly produce something worthwhile. But we really wonder about that. He is the prince of darkness and there is no light in him.

Every false teacher we have ever heard or after whom we have read produces something now and then that sounds and looks pretty good. Some of the denominationalists will occasionally preach a rather decent sermon on some subjects, such as morality. But because they now and then say what is right are we without responsibility to present them as someone reliable and trustworthy? Cannot we teach truth without giving the credit to some false teacher who on some point taught the truth? Just why some wish to exalt those who teach error, even when they may be teaching the truth, only enhances the influence of the false teacher.

We often read articles that faithful brethren publish but are written by liberals and digressives. Whether intended or not, copying articles of those who lead the way into apostasy can only expand their influence. Brethren, preach the truth and do not leave the impression that a false teacher can be trusted.



## ***Much Ado About Nothing***

Advocates of modern versions try to justify the new books by attacking the King James Version. One point of attack is First John 5:17. *"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one."*

While there is evidence that this verse does not belong in the text, there is also evidence that it does. I believe it belongs where it is. But consider what the verse teaches.

Man is not at liberty to add nor subtract from God's Word. If it does not belong, it teaches nothing that is not taught elsewhere; namely, Deity testifies of Christ and while three persons there is but one Godhead. If it does belong, it teaches nothing additional to what is taught elsewhere. So nothing is added or subtracted by it regardless of what disposition one makes of it. We should admit this.

Defenders of modern versions seemingly have never come to grips with the real issue regarding the modern versions. The issue is doctrine, true or false. To attack reliable versions trying to establish those proven to be unreliable is beneath honorable argumentation.

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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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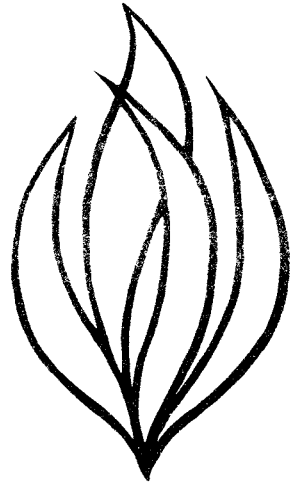
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# A Burning Fire



“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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# **Loose Him, And Let Him Go**

The Bible student will recognize the title of this lesson as the words of Jesus that were spoken at the climax of one of the more momentous events during His earthly ministry. That was the time of the raising of Lazarus from the dead as recorded in John 11:1-45.

That account is an inspired history that tells of one who was once physically dead but returned to life. Unlike many who claim to have returned from the dead today, we do not read of Lazarus reviewing his "experiences" that occurred during his death and thereafter. The importance of the event actually lies in what it reveals concerning Christ and God, the Father. John 1:18, *"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."* Hebrews 1:3 identifies Jesus as the *"brightness of his glory and the express image of his person."* John 14:8,9,11, *"Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?...Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me..."* As Jesus is revealed, so the Father is also revealed. In this event of raising Lazarus, we take note of several characteristics of Jesus.

## **Lazarus Is Sick**

The record begins with Jesus beyond Jordan where John first baptized. Word came that Lazarus was sick in Bethany. He was the brother of Mary and Martha. *"Lord, behold, he who thou lovest is sick."* But Jesus did not react as we probably would, going immediately to his side. Jesus knew this was an opportunity to glorify God and identify Himself as the Son of God. He remained where He was for two more days, then left for Judea.

It was dangerous for Him to go because *"the Jews of late sought to stone"* Him. After Jesus explained to His disciples that Lazarus had died, even they were determined to follow Him into

the area of danger. *"Let us go that we may die with him."*

Do not we see the great love Jesus had for His friends? Are we not impressed with His sense of duty toward God and His mission on earth? We are shown His matchless courage in face of anger and danger. But even more to the benefit of others, He was able to provoke courage and confidence in the minds of His disciples to the extent they were willing to risk themselves in order to follow Him. He was such a positive example of leadership.

### **Arrives At Bethany**

When Jesus first arrived at Bethany, Lazarus had been dead for four days. He was first met by Martha. *"Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee."* The confidence she had in Jesus and the knowledge of His relationship to the Father is quite evident. She was sure Jesus could have prevented the death of Lazarus. But even though He had been absent at the time when she would have had Him present, her confidence in Him was not shaken in the least. That she expected Jesus to raise her brother from the dead is not evident, however, from what transpires. She was simply saying, in terms we often use, "If only you could have come sooner."

Their conversation continued. *"Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus saith unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto him, Yea, Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world."* (John 11:23-27).

There is much revealed concerning Christ in that passage. The words spoken between them were "deep water" for Martha and for us. She had hope in the eventual resurrection, as Jesus had 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). This truth is a great comfort to all who are faithful followers of Christ when they are called to lay to rest the bodies of their faithful brethren and loved ones taken by

physical death.

## **The Power**

But Jesus means far more than the immeasurable and eventual resurrection. He proclaims Himself as the power behind the resurrection. He is the conqueror over death as much as He was conqueror over disease. He is the source of life. He leads mankind to victory over the last enemy, which is death. Furthermore, the life that He offers is an eternal life. This life can belong to one and all by believing in Him. This faith, which in the Scriptures is always an active, obedient faith, is underscored in verse twenty-six. The life of which He spoke here is spiritual life. As evidence of His power to give spiritual life, He would show His power over physical death. He did this at the tomb of Lazarus, at His own tomb, and will show it again with His coming and the resurrection of all in the graves.

To what extent Martha grasped His teaching we can only wonder. But one thing she did know and was certain, Jesus is the Son of God, the promised Messiah that was prophesied to come. She confessed that truth regarding Him. While she might not have fully understood the extent of the blessings received in Christ (and who would dare say that he does?), she did lay hold on the basic, fundamental, and essential truth about Jesus. This truth is that which He wants all people to recognize and from which to receive benefit. This truth is the foundation upon which everything else regarding Christianity is founded (Matthew 16:16-18).

## **Later Events**

The events that followed tell us more about our Lord. He was later met by the other sister, Mary, who came quickly to the tomb and to Jesus. The scriptures say that some thought she was going to the tomb to mourn. When she saw Jesus she said, "*Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.*" She, too, believed in the power of Jesus to spare her brother, if only He had been present. When Jesus saw her weeping, He was obviously moved with compassion and sympathy, and the shortest verse of Scripture in the Bible records, "*Jesus wept.*" Bear in mind that His friend had died and His friends were in grief. While He was Deity, He was also humanity, fashioned as a man (Philippians 2:8), and tempted in all points as are we

(Hebrews 4:15). None can deny the compassion of our Lord toward those who suffer. Some standing by commented, *"Behold, how he loved him!"*

Then Jesus commanded the unusual and unexpected. *"Take ye away the stone."* One sister objected because the body had been dead four days and doubtless, lacking the embalming measures commonly practiced today for all, decay had already begun its process. But Jesus insisted that it be done. *"Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?"* (verse 40).

Then Jesus prayed, *"Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me."* Here we learn the real reason for this entire episode. It was to provide evidence so the observers would believe in Him. People now, having this testimony from the Word of God also have evidence of His Deity. John wrote, *"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: but these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."* (John 20:30,31). In all of this we see the intense concern Jesus had for the spiritual welfare of all mankind.

### **He Arose**

Then came the climatic moment. *"And when he had thus spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them. Loose him, and let him go."* (verses 43-44).

Let us now raise the question, and it is not the first time it has been raised. In light of these things, as Jesus once asked the Pharisees, *"What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?"* (Matthew 22:42). He once asked His disciples, *"But whom say ye that I am?"* John 11:45 shows that many believed on Him because of this, but not all. Some went away to report the incident, but only to criticize and find fault with Him.

Sometimes people are heard to say that if they could see a miracle as those people did that they would believe. But why would they so reason? Are they really that different from people living then? Some saw the miracle and did not believe. Why would one necessarily conclude he might do differently? Do we

not realize that the same power behind the miracle is the power behind the inspired testimony of that miracle? To fail to believe on the basis of the divine testimony is to deny the power behind it. If one really believes that God is real and has all power, he will believe what God says as readily as he believes what God has done.

If you will properly consider what the inspired record has to say regarding the Christ, will you not believe and obey? What do you think of Christ? Is He the Son of God? Realizing that the evidence demands that you conclude that He is, why do you not come to Him now? The eternal life that He brings will be yours.

† † † † †

## ***Blood In Salvation***

Hebrews 9:22, *"And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission."*

There were several means of "purification" under the Old Law, depending on what was being purified and the procedure to be followed. Sometimes it was with water, fire, or a combination of elements. These were the exception to the general rule that there was the use of blood.

There is no remission of sins apart from the shedding of blood. To this law there was, and is, no exception. Every sin required a payment, some kind of atonement, a cleansing. Blood was required.

This statement we accept inasmuch as it comes from God's book. Out of respect for what God has said we do not question the truthfulness of it. To try to explain why this is true may be beyond our ability. The fact remains it is according to the wisdom of God that such be the case. It is a cardinal point in the doctrine of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. While modernists seek to dismiss the efficacy of blood, the Scriptures continue to teach that there is no remission or redemption for man from his sins without blood. Such is God's revelation and will.

### **Blood Used**

There was much animal blood shed during the former dispensations prior to the system of Christ. But animal blood did not forgive sins. At best sins were rolled forward, so to speak, and the sacrifices were offered repeatedly. Hebrews 10:4, *"For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins."* Earlier in the chapter the explanation is given. *"For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because the worshippers once purged should have no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year."* (Hebrews 10:1-3).

Hebrews 9:11-14, *"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 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?"*

His sacrifice was once, and for all, and paid the price justice demanded because of sin. Hebrews 10:19, *"By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."* We can declare with confidence that principle of God that without the shedding of blood there is no remission.

### **Eat No Blood**

In every dispensation man has been forbidden to eat blood. From Adam to the flood, man was a vegetarian (Genesis 1:29). After the flood, man was permitted to eat animal flesh (Genesis 9:3,4). Even so, man could not eat the blood as he ate the flesh. Animal sacrifices had been offered all along, but the blood was not to be eaten. Man was prohibited from shedding the blood of his fellowman (Genesis 9:6).

In the Mosaic Age, *"Moreover ye shall eat no manner of blood, whether it be of fowl or of beast, in any of your dwellings. Whatsoever soul it be that eateth any manner of blood, even*

*that soul shall be cut off from his people.” (Leviticus 7:26,27). “And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul...For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof: therefore I said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh: for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof: whosoever eateth it shall be cut off.” (Leviticus 17:10-12,14).*

In the Christian age many things were different from former ages. But regarding the eating of blood, the law changed not. Acts 15:20,29 *“But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood...That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.”* Acts 21:25, *“As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.”* The reason given throughout is because the life was in the blood.

Jehovah Witnesses have concluded that this also prohibits taking blood transfusions. But taking blood through the digestive system and taking a transfusion are not the same. Being plunged under water while swimming is not the same as baptism, although there are similarities. Having a hand cut off by accident, and having it amputated are similar but not the same. There is no passage in Scripture that prohibits man from taking advantage of blood transfusions. By such reasoning, taking any medication that was from outside one's body would be condemned. This is not God's will, but a doctrine that began around 1942.

### **Blood Is Special**

Blood has always been considered special by the Lord. God has used blood many times for many purposes. Blood protected the Israelites from harm just prior to their leaving Egypt. The blood of the lamb was sprinkled on the doorposts and lintels and

when God passed through the land He promised, "*When I see the blood I will pass over you.*" Though the firstborn of Egypt died, not so with the Israelites. In similar principle now, when the blood of Christ, "*the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world,*" (John 1:29), is applied, God will spare us from spiritual death in hell.

Under the Mosaic System, on the tenth day of the seventh month the high priest, being alone in the tabernacle, would enter the Most Holy Place, but "*not without blood.*" (Hebrews 9:6,7). He would sprinkle blood upon and before the mercy seat. The mercy seat denoted the special presence of God and His mercy toward Israel. God's mercy was available because of the blood of the sacrifice. All of this was a type of things to come concerning the blood of Jesus Christ.

### **Mercy By Blood**

We, too, have access to the mercy of God and His presence through the shedding of the Lord's blood at Calvary. This is why we read that we are "*justified by his blood,*" (Romans 5:9), "*having made peace through the blood of his cross,*" (Colossians 1:20), the church purchased by His blood, (Acts 20:28), and how God set Christ forth "*to be a propitiation through faith in his blood,*" (Romans 3:24).

Both the Old and New Covenants were dedicated with blood, (Hebrews 9:18; 10:29). Just as those things under the old were dedicated by blood, so what we do under the new has also been sanctified by His blood.

Realizing that our salvation is dependent on the blood of Christ, that we are purified by His blood, sanctified (set apart) by His blood, we must understand how to reach His blood and apply His blood for our benefit. The application cannot be ignored if we are to be saved. Let us illustrate: A man may have dirty hands, desiring that they be clean, knowing that soap and water are available that will clean them. But before the cleansing agent will accomplish the desired and needed purpose that agent must be applied. Many has a dirty sin-stained soul, with a desire to be clean, knowing that the cleansing agent for his soul is the blood of Christ. But the blood will not clean until applied.

### **Reaching The Blood**

The blood of Christ was shed in His death on Calvary (John

19:31-34). We are baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4), where His blood was shed. We reach the benefit of His blood then and there because in baptism is where God applies to our soul the agent that cleanses us from sin. It is not water by which we are made spiritually clean, even though water is the element into which we are baptized (immersed). We are saved by His blood. As Paul told the Romans (Romans 6:16-18), when they obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine, the doctrine being the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and baptism the form of it, then they were no longer servants of sin but became servants of righteousness.

We can stay clean by the blood of Christ (First John 1:6,7), "*If we walk in the light as he is in the light,*" which means faithfulness to our Christian responsibilities. As long as we are faithful, we remain in contact with His blood, that is in His body, (as our blood is in our body), and His body is the church (Ephesians 1:22,23).

Christ said that His blood was "*poured out for many.*" He died for the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2). By dying, He made possible man's salvation. God, through blood, saves man from the wages of sin. Just as our physical blood gives life, so the blood of Jesus Christ gives eternal spiritual life. Furthermore, "*without the shedding of blood there is no remission,*" (Hebrews 9:22).

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(from page 16)

ourselves in thinking we are something when we are nothing, or at best, very little benefit to the church. Is it not time we all abandon the "they" attitude about the church and nurture a "we" attitude toward it?

Brethren, be faithful and demonstrate loyalty to what you say you love. Guard your tongue, have an attitude to do right, and let that attitude be evident in your deeds. Attend regularly and faithfully. Give liberally and cheerfully. Assume your rightful share of the responsibility to assure the success of the collective efforts of brethren in your community. Know your Bible. Hold up the hands of faithful brethren who preach it. You can be an asset to the cause of Christ rather than a liability. Learn to carry, not have to be carried. Learn to pull, and not always have to be pushed. Learn to assist and not demand assistance. Keep up, rather than having to be kept after.

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# ***New International Version***

Second Timothy 3:16,17, *“All scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”* This passage affirms the verbal inspiration of Scripture, its infallibility, inerrancy, authoritativeness and authority. The Scriptures were originally penned in Hebrew, Greek, and small portions in Aramaic, as the writers were guided by the Holy Spirit. Our language is English. Therefore, we read a translation of what the Holy Spirit provided. This discussion shall not deal with translations generally, but with one particularly.

The New International Version is among many “modern speech” versions published today. It is very popular and upheld generally by the religious world. It is accepted as reliable by many brethren. But is it a reliable version? It makes a difference! Being accepted by some, even most, is not the criteria to use to determine its acceptability. Does it truly reveal all God has said or what God has said?

## **Opinion Or Faith**

Some contend that which version one uses is merely a matter of opinion. We agree it is a matter of opinion which reliable version one might use. But is not the faith involved when we assume a version to be reliable when it is not? We are confident that many have been sold to accept the NIV by those who are more concerned to have something new rather than what is true.

The NIV first came on the scene in the 1970's, produced by the New York Bible Society, claiming to be a new version. But in many instances it is a new book, as we shall prove. It was compiled by people from various denominations, using what they called an “electic” text (no standard text, but an undisciplined random text determined by conscience). This admits the version is the result of negotiation. It admits having “fidelity to the thought of the New Testament writers,” but not necessarily what the writers actually wrote. It is therefore a commentary produced by denominationalists as they were guided by their consciences and the results of their negotiations.

But we should want the words of the New Testament writers accurately translated, not what some denominationalists thought they may have meant. Already the NIV has undergone many changes which challenge the integrity of its producers. We wish to offer several reasons for saying the NIV is an unreliable Bible.

### **Omissions**

There are many omissions, and many portions that are included are footnoted so they might be held suspect as being true Scripture. Many have objected to the Reader's Digest Bible which has omitted sixty per cent of Scripture. Thomas Jefferson once produced a New Testament that omitted so much of the New Testament. The NIV has done the same thing on a lesser scale. This is a valid criticism also of the American Standard Version which is very literal in what it translates, but there are even portions of Scripture left from it, and without just cause.

The NIV implies the last twelve verses of Mark 16 do not belong in the Bible. What does that text teach? It speaks of appearances of Jesus after His resurrection, His ascension, the Great Commission, conditions of salvation, the purpose of miracles, and Christ taking His place by the right hand of God. Are these minor matters? But someone complains that these things are taught elsewhere, and this is true. But what right does man have to omit the truth here? If men can take the liberty to omit truth here, what is to prevent them from taking out truth anywhere else at any other time they might choose?

The story of the woman taken in adultery (John 7:53-8:11) is another example. It is stated that "the most reliable early MSS omit..." this passage. The truth is that ninety-eight per cent of textual evidence demands its inclusion and only two highly suspect manuscripts omit it. These same two manuscripts omit Hebrews from 9:14 onward, and most of Revelation. The oldest evidence includes the passage.

Then there is the omission of the confession of the Ethiopian prior to his baptism (Acts 8:37). Numerous references to Christ and His name are omitted, calling Him simply Jesus, sometimes calling Him Christ but then omitting His name of Jesus, separating Jesus from the Christ. Entire verses are omitted. Portions of scores of passages are omitted. A. G. Hobbs has compiled five booklets discussing this "version," in which he lists passage after passage that the "translators" have left out. I contend this matters. We do not have in the NIV the whole

counsel of God as given by the Holy Spirit even in our own tongue.

### **Contradictions**

There are fundamental contradictions in the NIV. One that is characteristic of so many of these “new versions” is the contradiction between Matthew 5:17 and Ephesians 2:15 that teaches Jesus did not destroy but did fulfill the Old Law. They have Paul saying Jesus did destroy it. It is said that Christ said He did not come to abolish the law, but Paul says He did. When you bring that before the advocates of the NIV they often will respond, “Oh, I have heard that one before.” Sure they have, and they will keep on hearing it. Do they think because this gross contradiction has been cited before that it is no longer a valid criticism?

### **False Doctrines**

There are false doctrines taught in the NIV. We do not charge that it contains no truth. Most all the “versions” do. But we charge that it teaches error, error that if believed and followed, will condemn the soul. It teaches the doctrine of inherited sin, original sin, that one is born depraved (Psalm 51:5). You may believe that doctrine but the Bible does not teach it, but the NIV does. Ezekiel 18:2, Romans 14:12, Matthew 18:3; 19:14 all disprove such a doctrine. One scholar on the faculty at Harding Graduate School even said on television that there was no difference between the teaching of the NIV and the KJV in this passage. His comment is ridiculous and absurd, prejudicial, and dishonest, because he wants people to swallow the NIV.

It changes Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 to read that the cause God accepts for divorce to be “marital infidelity.” But the cause is fornication. There are many kinds of infidelities, but the Scripture specifies which one. One can beat his wife, not support her, not cohabit, but never commit fornication. This passage plays into the hands of a world that condones divorce for whatever reason one may want it.

In Ephesians 5:19 it uses the term “make music” when the text says God said “sing.” You can make music many ways, but singing is specific.

Romans 7,8, contain nine instances, Galatians 5 has four instances, and Ephesians 2:3 one instance where the NIV

speaks of the "sinful nature" of man. Such is not even in the text. This is blatant Calvinistic terminology that contends man is born with a sinful nature. But man acquires a sinful nature by sinning. There is no justification for translating the word "flesh" to mean "sinful nature."

Romans 1:17 in the NIV teaches salvation by faith only "from first to last." This is simple a false doctrine.

### **Only Begotten**

Regarding "only begotten," monogenes, the NIV says it means the redundant "one and only." The truth is that Christ is not the one and only child or son of God. This is a similar error of the Revised Standard Version. Monogenes demands it be translated "only begotten," which expresses His Deity. One of our liberal and digressive self-proclaimed "scholars" says it merely means "unique." Another says it means "especially precious." Christ is unique, but so is each man unique. But monogenes informs us what that uniqueness is. Talk about changing words! Especially precious! This is nothing but commentary that robs the passage of its affirmation of the Deity of Christ. The "unique" scholar once taught just as I am teaching but somewhere along the line he got "smart."

Acts 2:27,31 translated "hades" as merely the grave. This is materialism akin to Jehovah's Witnesses doctrines. It has Second Peter 3:10 saying when Christ returns the world will simply be "laid bare," not burned up. I once told a church in Texas from the looks of things in the territory I had to come through to get the them that Christ must have already come there. It was sure laid bare.

They footnote Matthew 24:34 that "generation" can mean "race." This is changing the word to fit premillennialism. The Jewish race still exists. The prophecies of Christ concerning the destruction of Jerusalem were to happen in that generation, not after the Jewish race ceased to exist. Acts 10:35 removes the word "righteousness" for "right doing." There is more to righteousness than simply "right doing." (Psalm 119:105). How much more evidence does one need to hold the NIV as unreliable? These instances can be, and have been, multiplied in extensive works that review the NIV. Does it matter to those who read?

We can justifiably be critical of the looseness of the translators where they may make a fairly decent commentary on a verse,

but their commentary is not a translation. Matthew 26:41 changes “enter not into temptation” to read “not fall” into temptation. One might accidentally fall into temptation, but one can also deliberately enter into temptation. Why not leave the passage as God said it? To call the “mote” a “speck of sawdust” (Matthew 7:3) may illustrate the term but it does not translate it. The “translators” were just too “free” to inject what they thought more than what God said.

### **Commentary**

We need to note the difference between a commentary or a paraphrase and a translation of the Word of God. Preachers comment. They even paraphrase. But only the text can be cited as authority. Yet, the NIV is an admitted commentary and paraphrase, but presented as the text. This is simply not trustworthy.

Those who promote the NIV do so in some of the most unscrupulous ways. They have charged people with not wanting others to have the Bible. The truth is we want people to have the Bible, not a perversion of it. They claim opponents of the NIV do not want to update language. This is a lie. We oppose error, not truth. That words change meaning is acknowledged. That words become archaic and obsolete is true. But archaic and obsolete words are not “errors,” and should not be “corrected” with words that do not even mean the same things under the guise of updating language. This is dishonest maneuvers by modern speech advocates.

### **Attacks Against KJV**

But some, while piously professing “love” for the King James Version, have attacked it, can hardly ever find anything decent to say about it, and produce the most ridiculous objections to it. They think if they can discredit the KJV, which they used to never do, that somehow this will make the NIV more reliable. Rubel Shelly, well known at this writing for his numerous false positions, once said, “When you read the King James Version, the American Standard Version, the Revised Standard Version, and the New International Version, you are reading the very words of God.” How can this be when they do not say the same things, do not present the same truths even in synonymous terms, do not teach the same doctrine in many

instances?

Some, like Jack Lewis, have openly declared that elderships do not have the authority to make congregational policy that omits the modern versions from public use and endorsement. To push the perversions into the brotherhood they even deny fundamental truth about the role and duty of elderships. They want everybody to use and promote, endorse and teach from whatever they want to, and elderships just sit back and shut up about it. So is the manner of modern version proponents.

To gain an insight into the reliability of Shelly, he is the same man that has taught there are Christians in all denominations, that we cannot tell who is saved or lost, that God's grace will cover the impenitent, sinning Christian, that one does not have to know he was baptized for the remission of sins for baptism to be valid. Shall we listen to such false teachers and their doctrines, even when they try to cram false versions down the throats of brethren?

These things mean something to those who want truth. Seldom, if ever, do advocates of modern versions deal with such things. To oppose them is to be a Pharisee and traditionalist, according to them. They have been more successful in "shouting down" the opposition to modern versions than meeting the issue. They really have never grasped the issue. The issue is not translation, but mistranslation. It is not versions but perversions. The issue is false doctrines versus the truth. There be many who would not tolerate the preacher teaching from the pulpit what the NIV teaches, but turn around and promote the NIV as reliable. Can you imagine a more ignorant inconsistency?

### **Easy To Read**

But some contend that it is so easy to read. But are we not concerned about what we are reading. It is far easier to define what is sometimes called an archaic term than to have to try to explain why such obvious false doctrines are included in modern passages. The average length of words in the KJV is five letters. Is it too hard for these liberal "scholars," the ones who are promoting them loudly? Such versions as the KJV have been read and understood for years on end by millions. Why is it that suddenly it is beyond everybody? Is it not because some want these new things to break from the past so they can inject their new ways? We contend so. Nobody has objection to updating

words, but that does not justify rewriting the Bible and calling it God's Word.

### **Unreliable**

I cannot and will not endorse such books as the NIV so long as truth means anything to me. The NIV, like most modern versions, are dangerous to the stability and welfare of the church because it not only contains fatal error but because it reflects the willingness of brethren to just go along with it.

The colleges have been in the foreground promoting the modern versions. Some were doing it even as they denied doing it. They were lying through their liberal teeth, and when their hand was called you never heard nor saw any more vicious conduct than they exhibited. Why do people who say they love truth want to endorse and promote as reliable any book that removes evidences of the Deity of Christ that God has provided? Why uphold a book that leaves out precious statements of truth? Why a "Bible" that teaches denominational dogmas that are false? Why lean and uphold a volume that contradicts itself, but more significantly, contradicts what God has given?

### **Warning**

I warn you against the NIV and the low road taken by many of those who are promoting it. I urge no use of those who show themselves to care no more for truth, regardless of their pious words, than to endorse it, defend it, and encourage its adoption. Those who do so do not servewell the cause of Christ, I care not who they are or how faithful they once appeared to be. God's warnings against tampering with His Word are too plain for any true disciple of Christ to want to lend any kind of support to it. Let us be a people of The Book, not men or just some book.

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(from page 24)

there be an evening worship, or a mid-week Bible study? Would the aged be visited, the sick comforted, the weary encouraged, the bereaved consoled, the orphan clothed? Would there be gospel meetings? Would the newcomers be greeted and welcomed? Would the Bible be studied at home? Would many prayers ascend except in times of distress?

Let us be fair and honest with ourselves, not deceiving  
(to page 9)

# ***The Jailor's Conversion***

On Paul's second missionary journey he came to Troas and saw a vision of a man from Macedonia saying to him, "*Come over into Macedonia and help us.*" Paul said he was obedient to this vision (Acts 16:10-12). Several events follow this last passage that are also recorded in Acts 16, such as the conversion of Lydia, and the time when Paul and Silas cast out the evil spirit from a soothsaying maiden. This action prompted considerable opposition against Paul because those who were using her special abilities became angry. "*And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, and brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.*" (Acts 16:19-24).

While they were in prison there began a series of events, nine in number, that resulted in the conversion of the jailor. In this study we can see the process involved in the conversion of a person to Christ.

## **Unaware**

One, we must be mindful that at the time he put Paul and Silas in stocks he was not aware that he was a spiritually lost soul. He was busy in his occupation as a soldier of Rome, a keeper of the prison, with the prestige, power, and recognition such a profession brought him. Religiously, he was a pagan, and of the race of the Gentiles.

Paul and Silas had been preaching in the city and their preaching, unlike that which some call preaching today that disturbs nobody, stirred the city and provoked a controversy. If one should ask him at this point, "What do you think of the preaching of these men?" he would likely have no real opinion one way or the other. He did not consider it to be of any

concern to him. He was lost, completely without hope, but did not know it and was not concerned about it. The reason for mentioning this first fact and his indifference to the gospel is because there are so many people in the world today in exactly the same situation. They are pre-occupied with many other things, but lost because they are not in Christ where salvation is (Second Timothy 2:10).

### **Shaken**

Two, God sent an earthquake and the jailor was physically and spiritually shaken before the series of events came to an end. *"And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awakening out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled."* (Verses 26,27). It was his responsibility to keep the prisoners secure and the penalty for allowing any to escape was disgrace and death. Rather than face the disgrace, he was going to kill himself.

Sometimes people have to be shaken in some manner before they realize the spiritual danger they are suffering. Tragedy strikes before some ever open their eyes. They have to have a personal "earthquake" like financial ruin, disease, near death for themselves, or the death of a loved one. Something has to break their confidence and trust in the worldly things and cause them to face the reality of eternity. Such an "earthquake" often opens the mind sufficiently to allow the sowing of the seed of truth into what was heretofore hardened ground. They have to be disturbed. Nobody ever comes to Christ unless they are first disturbed and loosed from their complacency and false security.

### **Concern**

Three, he sprang into the place where his prisoners were, trembling for fear. Think of what had happened to this man. He went to bed perfectly satisfied, but at midnight things began to bring changes. He was made afraid. It is good sometimes to be made afraid, just plain scared, terrified. We can become so self-satisfied, self-sufficient, self-confident, that nothing but fright can cause us to realize our dependence on something other than

ourselves. This fear and trembling brought about fact number four.

### **Humility**

Four, the jailor was humbled. The once proud and glorious officer was brought low, so low that he, a Roman, even ran to the prisoners, even the lowly and despised Jews, seeking aid from them. He fell down before them, asking a serious question.

The point we want to make here is that before we can be exalted, we must be humbled. Before we can be pleasing in the eyes of God we must be lowly in our own eyes. We do not need just a humble countenance and an outward show of piety, but to be the possessor of a genuine, sincere, submissive heart before God. Not until we accept our inability to save ourselves will we place our confidence in the only One that can save us. Jeremiah taught many years ago that we cannot direct our own paths (Jeremiah 10:23). In a humble frame of mind one is teachable.

### **What To Do**

Five, the jailor asked a question of Paul and Silas. *"What must I do to be saved?"* The very question reflects some understanding on the part of the jailor at this point about salvation. It also reflected his knowledge that there was something he must do in obtaining salvation. It was no longer a matter that he could ignore.

Some have conjectured that the man was merely asking what he could do to spare his life from punishment. But this is not true for at least three reasons. (1) Prisoners would have no influence or power to deal with such as that. (2) There was no reason for him to fear punishment since all the prisoners were secure, even though their bands were loosed. (3) The answer Paul gives shows what "salvation" was under discussion, and it had to do with salvation through Christ. He was seeking the salvation that had been preached and had brought these men into the prison. He realized that there was something he had to do to be saved and he wanted to know what it was.

### **Answer**

Six, Paul gave him the answer that anyone would give to another who knew as little about being saved as this jailor did.

He told him the very first thing to do was, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*" (Verse 31). To be saved, one must have faith (Hebrews 11:6). Paul did not say this was all he had to do, but this was the first thing anyone has to do once he has heard the Word and knows he is lost. Nothing here or anywhere else in the New Testament teaches that salvation is by faith alone. The very next fact proves that believing is just the beginning.

One additional comment is needed. If faith alone was all that Paul taught to be necessary for salvation, then Paul was also teaching that one person could believe for another in order to another to be saved. If Paul taught salvation by faith alone, he also taught that some could be saved on the basis of the faith of somebody else. Nobody who has any respect for Scripture at all would dare claim we can be saved because somebody else believes. Faith was the beginning step for this jailor and for his family if they were to ever be saved.

### **Gospel**

Seven, Paul preached the gospel to this man so he would know what to believe. "*And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.*" (Verse 32). How could this man believe until he knew what to believe? "*Faith cometh of hearing...*" (Romans 10:17). How long this teaching required we have no information. It would include anything and everything concerning Christ, prophecies, His birth, life, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, kingdom, commands, promises, warnings, and many other areas of vital instruction. Certainly, whatever the man did thereafter to be saved was included in Paul's preaching the Word of the Lord.

### **Obedied**

Eight, "*And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes, and was baptized, he and all his household.*" (Verse 33). The jailor, and others of his family, obeyed what they were taught to do. Washing the stripes and wounds of the men he had previously caused to be beaten and sanctioned their imprisonment is evidence of genuine repentance. Obviously, Paul taught him to be baptized, and he obeyed. When the apostle taught the Word of God people wanted to be baptized. When many preach today they never even hear about it.

Becoming a Christian may well have been very costly for this man, but once he knew he was lost, knew what to do to be saved, he did not hesitate to act.

### **Rejoicing**

Nine, *“And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.”* (Verse 34). Notice the rejoicing did not occur until the acts of obedience were accomplished. Again, notice the inclusion of the faith that he had. It included active, obedient faith, not just mental assent. Only a few hours earlier the man was spiritually lost. Now there was a family of Christians living in Philippi. And entire new life was opened to them. They were new creatures in Christ. They could look forward to a new future, a new relationship with God, a new hope and assurance that all was well with their souls. Heaven was before him and he had started his journey.

From this inspired record of this man’s conversion we can learn what anyone, even today, must do to be saved. The question should be asked by everyone, and the answer is the same for everyone. Have you asked what you must do? Have you done as he did?

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## **What Am I Worth To The Church**

There are many passages of Scripture that discuss the quality of character that is supposed to be possessed by those who follow Christ. Most of the epistles of the New Testament are directed to that end. While there is a desire among brethren to enlarge the numbers of people who profess to be members of the church (and this is proper because each number represents a soul), has there been the sufficient emphasis on the quality of character the Lord expects of the church member? Quantity without quality avails nothing. It is easier to measure quantity

than quality but much of Scripture is devoted to quality.

There are serious considerations each Christian must ponder as he lives his life before God and man while professing to be the Lord's disciple. Being a name on a church roll does not necessarily mean one has his name "*written in the book of life.*" (Revelation 20:15; 21:27). Our lesson does not center on the value to the member of being in the church, but on what worth the member may be to the rest of the church. It should not have to be argued that each member has a duty to every other member. Nor should it be argued the possibility that many church members are deceiving themselves into thinking all is well with their souls. The churches of New Testament records had people who thought they were spiritually alive, but were spiritually dead (Revelation 3:1). Every congregation likely has its "dead weight" of inactive members who evidently think they shall ride into heaven on the good lives of other members and they are worth very little to the church. Some have obviously not put away the old man with his sinning ways but continue in sin even though they are church members. They want to take the blessings that are offered, but are unwilling to give the life that is required of them. Will you ask yourself, "What am I worth to the church?" It could be a spiritual eye-opener to seriously investigate and self-examine.

### **Self-Examination**

Paul urged in First Corinthians 11:28, "*But let a man examine himself...*" Second Corinthians 13:5, "*Prove your own selves, whether ye be in the faith.*" Galatians 6:3-5, "*For if a man thinketh himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself, and not in another. For every man shall bear his own burden.*"

Are you an asset or a liability to the church? Are your brethren sometimes ashamed of you, and for good reason, due to your conduct, your attitude, your manner of speech, the things in which you get involved, your habits? Do others have to constantly struggle to explain you because they are ashamed of your actions? Can they be at ease in your company, not fearing that you will burst forth with something profane, vulgar, uncouth, or degrading? There are people who evidently have more fear of a preacher than they do God, because they will be on guard about their conduct in his presence but fail to realize

how God is aware of them all the time.

Evil conduct by a church member gives a “black eye” to the church and hurts every member. God’s people are like an epistle being read by other people (Second Corinthians 3:2). What do they read about the church of Christ as they “read” you? We have heard people comment regarding some brother that if every member was like him the church must be a wonderful church. But we have also heard people say regarding some member that if they represent the kind of church we are, they would never want to be a member of it.

### **Help Or Hindrance**

Are you a help or a hindrance to the work the church undertakes? Some are always ready to do whatever they can to assist, and they are loyal and faithful to their duties. Others, who may be personally prevented from doing something, are strong moral supporters and encouragers in the work. But some drag their feet, do not help, will not help, cannot be counted on, often criticizing those who are busy. Which are you? Do you help or hinder? There were both kinds in yesteryear as the Bible reveals. Why should we think that both kinds do not exist today? One of the most revealing commentaries about a congregation is how the membership supports the Bible study periods and gospel meetings. It shows their attitude toward the truth, their interest in souls, their willingness to cooperate, and whether they will help or hinder the work.

Does the fact you are a member of some local church add strength and character to that church? Do people think better of the church because of you? Or do they get a distorted picture of Christ and those who are His disciples? How it hurts to have non-members say, “You people may preach godly living, but the members are tearing down what you preach faster than you can build up because of the manner of life they live.” When those not yet in Christ observe you, are they inclined to want to be a Christian, or had they just as soon remain as they are?

### **If Like You**

What kind of knowledge of the Bible would the church have if every member studied the Bible like you do? What if all had the same zeal, love, determination to know, and interest as you demonstrate? How many do we see sitting in the pews who

never come to Bible study, never read their Bible daily during a week, give Bible study no more than a few minutes in-and-out consideration during one sermon each week, and that not every week? Is not there something odd about that person who claims to love God and His will, but will show so little concern for he Bible? You simply are not an asset to the church when you say you love truth but neglect growth therein.

The same questions could be asked about visiting the needy, caring for the sick, reaching the lost, recovering the fallen, attending the aged, lifting the discouraged, and every other work that Christians can and ought to be doing. Such questions could be multiplied, but surely enough has been mentioned for you to get the idea. Whether you are just a "conscience soother" and a "dead weight" or a real "worker for the Lord" matters. We are not accusing, but asking questions that demand answers for which we must have the right answers before we meet God in judgment.

Let us make just a few other practical measurements of ourselves. A person who works for a business firm should present himself with a large degree of reliability, dependableness, faithfulness, loyalty, and enthusiasm toward his responsibilities. Should not we have at least these same qualities toward the body of Christ if we profess to be a part of it? As absence from your job ought be felt because you are not there, should not your absence from the activities of the church be felt? If one can be absent and not be missed very much it is likely he is not doing very much so that he is missed. Once a man and his wife went away for a vacation that extended over a month, and upon their return walked back into the church building announcing, "We're back." One asked them where they had been and had not known they were gone. They were offended, but should not have been. They only attended now and then, and seldom were involved in anything the church attempted. They really were worth very little to the welfare of the church. They were riders. If most of the membership had been as they were there probably would not even be a congregation nearby for anybody to attend.

### **Kind Of Church**

The inevitable question must be raised: "What kind of church would this church be if every member were just like me?" Would the contribution be sufficient to meet the obligations? Would  
(to page 16)



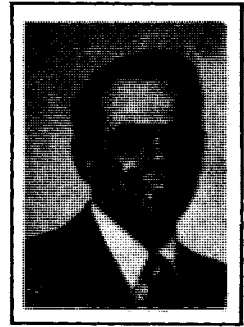
## **God Overruled**

It is evident from the Scriptures that God intended to provide for mankind a system of salvation and that through His Son Jesus Christ. It is deserving of our attention how so many things were in readiness for Christ and His gospel at the time He came into this world.

The Bible reveals how God used the Jews to bring the plan of redemption to light. What may not be so evident from Scripture is the contribution made by both the Greeks and the Romans.

The language of the Greeks had become known throughout the world. This was the language God later employed in producing the inspired Scriptures. It was a tongue that would facilitate the spread of the gospel because people everywhere were familiar with it. Alexander's conquests had paved the way for the advance of the gospel.

The social and governmental unity provided by Rome was a tremendous advantage. Also, the roads they built made travel easier. Their system of "rights" and protections, although lacking, played a major role in the early growth of the church. Was is just a coincidence that such things were in readiness?



**JAMES W. BOYD**

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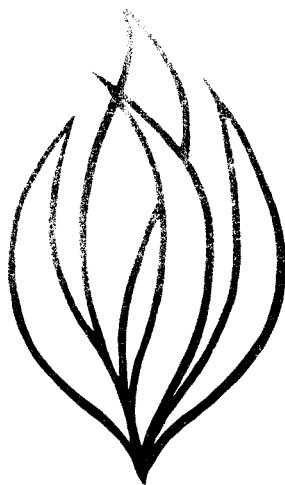
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# A Burning Fire



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



## THIS ISSUE

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# ***Where Was, And Is, The Church***

The period of history when the Roman Catholic Church ruled so much of Western society is called the Dark Ages, around 400 to 1400 A.D. Where was the true church of Christ during that span of years? Why is this question such an important one?

Members of the church of Christ reject being identified as a denomination. They are dedicated to the removal of denominationalism that has caused such widespread religious division and paved the way for the advance of atheism. They are intent on being just the church of which we read in the New Testament. They take seriously the prayer of Jesus in John 17 for unity among those who profess to follow Christ. With the desire that all people simply follow the Scriptures, they reject the creeds, disciplines, catechisms, manuals, prayer books, confessionals and other such "authorities" that are used by many in religion. The name "Christian" is the name disciples of Christ were called in Scripture and this is the name they seek for all to wear without other names that divide. To refer to those of the church of Christ as members of a denomination is to show contempt for their convictions, goals and practices. It is done either ignorantly or maliciously, either being reprehensible. Whatever be the motive of those who would call the church a denomination, it is a false charge, even though some who call themselves a "Church of Christ" may have adopted denominationalism and not remained a faithful church of the Lord.

## **The Pattern**

Things religious should be done according to the New Testament pattern. The New Testament is the blueprint to follow in reproducing Christianity in our own century. When Moses was given directions for building the tabernacle (Exodus 25:40), he was instructed to build according to the pattern God gave him. This was repeated in Hebrews 8:5. Following other "gospels" was condemned (Galatians 1:6-9; Second John 9-11). We are to neither add nor take from God's Word (Revelation 22:18,19). This is that which faithful members of the churches of Christ are committed to do. We seek to do and

be what was done in the New Testament regarding what to believe, how to become a Christian, worship, work, organization, manner of life and all other matters of Christianity. Peter's teaching is taken seriously when he wrote, "*If any man speak let him speak as the oracles of God.*" (First Peter 4:11). There should be a "*thus saith the Lord*" for religious authority and men should neither fall short of it nor presume to go beyond it. This purpose and mission cannot be wrong because it is what the Bible teaches is supposed to be.

## **Dark Ages**

Daniel prophesied the establishment of the kingdom of God (Daniel 2) when he interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream in which he saw an image of four parts that Daniel said represented four empires. During the days of the fourth, Babylon being the first, God would establish His kingdom. The Roman Empire was the fourth empire and during that period the Lord's kingdom came, which is His church. But please notice that Daniel's prophecy said the kingdom would stand forever. So again we ask, where was the church during the days of the Dark Ages? It certainly was not the Roman Catholic Church, that apostate body that was foreign to New Testament revelation. Rather, it was the result of the apostasy which Paul predicted would come.

In Matthew 13, Jesus taught seven parables regarding the kingdom. Beginning with verse three He taught the parable of the sower sowing seed. The seed fell on various kinds of soil, soil which represents the hearts of people. Luke 8:11 identifies the seed as the Word of God. We note the varied reactions and responses by people to the teaching of the Word.

## **The Seed**

The point of the parable is that the gospel, the seed, must be sown in the hearts of people. Whenever, wherever the gospel is preached, people hear it, believe it, and obey it, the Lord's church, His kingdom, will be produced. Even if one cannot trace congregations of faithful Christians down through the ages, and none can, so long as the seed remains the church has not been banished nor destroyed from the earth. Life is in the seed.

Let us illustrate. One may take kernels of corn, plant them, and reap a harvest of corn just like the harvest that formerly existed even if there had not been any harvest for many years

previously. The corn existed in seed form even if not as a stalk, ear or grain.

The seed of truth was sown on Pentecost and what was produced was the church belonging to Christ. If people will take that same seed and sow it today, can any other harvest come forth? Does not seed reproduce after its kind? New Testament Christians lived nearly two thousand years ago. Their religion was founded on the truth of God. Why should not people today take that same truth and be what they were?

### **No Line Necessary**

Some place great emphasis on tracing a continual line of succession from Pentecost until now. This is neither possible nor necessary to have the Lord's church today. For any church to make an attempted tracing of its history, it must of necessity pass through the years of apostate bodies, various Protestant digressions, Romanism, and other tangents from the truth. Should we be descendants of such things? Those were churches that came into existence as a result of tares of false doctrines rather than the seed of the kingdom.

We actually know only fragments of the work of the apostles, the early history of the church, and what happened in succeeding years. Peter and Paul dominate the New Testament historical record and what other apostles did we have no inspired record to any large extent. It is entirely possible that faithful Christians have existed in various places down through the many years since Pentecost. We are not affirming it because we cannot prove it, even though now and then there are hints and traces of evidence in that direction. But what of that anyway? That is not what is important as far as our own need to be Christians and having the knowledge how to become and remain faithful Christians! Regardless of where members of the church may or may not have been during the Dark Ages or any other time since Pentecost, the seed, the Word of God, is with us in the inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient Scriptures (Second Timothy 3:16,17). From it we can learn whatever we need and nothing is lacking therein.

Romanism is not the New Testament church. Its doctrines and practices vary too widely from God's revelation to deserve such an identification. The same is true regarding the Protestant denominational bodies. But there is a way to have the church, be the church, and know the truth.

Take God's pattern, the Bible. Follow it intently and faithfully. Either find the church that fits the pattern, or take the pattern and sow the seed and produce the church among people again. Therein one can learn everything that is necessary to being a member of the church revealed in the Bible.

### **The Right Church**

This matter of identifying the Lord's church has too often been complicated by irrelevant demands, assumptions, presumptions and misconceptions. Inasmuch as our salvation is at stake, it is time for plain words and unvarnished truth. Where was the church? If not in visible existence among men, it existed in seed form because the seed remained. Where is the church? Wherever people have heard, believed, obeyed and remain faithful in the doctrine of Christ the Lord's church exists. Churches that began at the wrong place, the wrong time, wearing the wrong name, practicing the wrong practices, teaching the wrong doctrine, organized the wrong way, worshipping the wrong way, cannot fit the inspired pattern. Our plea is for the church revealed in God's Word. This is right and cannot be wrong unless the Word itself is in error.

† † † † †

## ***Follow The Blind Man***

Read John 9:1-34 and become familiar with the account and the characters involved. Blind people often figure in Biblical events, especially in the New Testament and the miracles of Jesus and others. Opening the eyes of the blind, like one born blind, was considered impossible. But it had been prophesied that such would be a distinguishing mark of identification of the Messiah (Isaiah 29:18; 35:5).

Even in the Old Testament special consideration was given to the blind. Leviticus 19:14, *"Thou shalt not curse the deaf not put a stumblingblock before the blind..."* Deuteronomy 27:18, *"Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way..."*

The subject suggesting that we follow the blind man may

appear to contradict a warning of Jesus in Matthew 15:14, *“Let them alone; they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.”* Jesus was not speaking of physical sight but warning against false teachers. We should not follow false teachers lest we be destroyed as well as they. But the sense in which we admonish to follow the blind man is to encourage us to imitate him in his attitudes and actions that will prove beneficial to us. We shall mention four qualities deserving of imitation. But first let us understand the blind man himself.

### **His Blindness Healed**

The man had been born blind and his parents testified to that. His blindness was not due to any particular personal sin of which he or his parents were guilty. All afflictions are not directly tied to some personal transgression even though such things have resulted from sin coming into the world. Sometimes people have bad things to happen to them and they ask, “What did I do that God is punishing me?” True enough, we can bring calamity upon ourselves by sin, but hardships are common in life and not always due to the consequences of our guilt of sin. Jesus made this plain when he denied this man’s blindness was because of his sins, but *“that the works of God should be made manifest.”* The manner of healing was neither heard nor seen previously. Christ made clay from spittle, placed it on the man’s eyes, told him to go wash in the pool of Siloam, and the man obeyed and came away seeing. This was a miracle by the power of the Son of God. The power was not in the spittle, clay, water or the man, but Christ. But please notice, the beneficent power of the Lord was not realized by the man until he did what the Lord told him to do. It is the same principle of grace and obedience. We are saved by the grace of God, but not until we obey his voice.

The feat was so remarkable that everyone did not believe it was even the same man they had known being blind. Some said he was the same one, while others said they did not think so. His parents identified him and confessed he was born blind, but they refused to say how he received his sight because the people had already been warned not to acknowledge Christ lest they should be put out of the synagogue. They were afraid to answer, but told the inquirers to ask the man himself.

Did you notice in your reading that he was asked, repeatedly, how he was healed, and he responded over and over the same

thing? (Verses 13-15; 17; 24,27). His answer was rejected as often as it was given. The enemies of Christ had such a mind set against Him that they refused to conform to what the evidence demanded. The man was berated and ridiculed and under this pressure we see the exceptionally remarkable qualities of the blind man come forth. These are the qualities we hold before us that are worthy of imitation.

## **Courage**

First, we see his courage in confessing Christ as the One who healed him. Nearly everyone else was afraid to admit what they knew to be true. The penalty, exclusion from the synagogue, was more severe than just a denial of worship privileges. It would reflect on their character, their ability to earn a living among the people, their association with friends and family. They would be treated worse than lepers, being unwanted and despised. The enemies of Jesus had already decided to reject Christ and refused to give an credibility to evidence that would sustain His claim as the Son of God. Even the man's parents would not stand with him. But this man was willing to endure whatever consequences his confession brought him because he knew what was true.

It was outstanding then, and it is still so now, to find people with determination to be steadfast and loyal for what they know is true regardless of what others may or may not do or say. Most do not find it difficult to remain faithful when conditions are favorable. It is when the going gets tough that the tough get going. Too many have a religion of convenience rather than conviction. We commend the blind man and urge that we be courageous in standing for the truth as he did.

## **Faith**

Second, his disposition was one of faith over prejudice. Inasmuch as it was considered impossible for one born blind to see, yet, when he came seeing, he believed Jesus was from God. This reminds us of the words of Nicodemus, John 3:2, *"Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these miracles which thou doest, except God be with him."* The former blind man said, *"If this man were not of God he could do nothing."* (Verse 33). His attitude of faith overshadowed the attitude of others who defiantly stood in their

prejudices and refused to be swayed by the evidence.

The Pharisees said they knew about Moses, but as for Christ, *"we know not from whence he is."* The blind man caught the inconsistency they displayed and so should we. If they admitted they did not know about Christ, why were they so sure about their position against Him? Their trouble was they had already agreed not to believe regardless of what they heard or saw. They were in the unenviable position of those who seized Peter and John after raising a lame man in Acts 4, for they knew a notable miracle had been done, could not deny it, did not deny it, but refused to admit it just the same. Eyewitnesses were there, even the man himself, yet they denied it.

But the former blind man would not allow prejudice, or the pressure of other prejudiced people, to steer him away from the truth that he knew confidently.

### **Gratitude**

In addition to his courage and faith, he was a man of gratitude. Our Lord taught people to be thankful for their blessings and to realize that God is the source of our blessings. It is common courtesy to say "thank you" to those who favor you. In our giving, give thanks. This man showed his gratitude in what he said and did.

When he met Jesus again, scripture says, *"He worshipped him."* (Verse 38). He acknowledged, *"A man that is called Jesus made clay, and anointed mine eyes, and said unto me, Go to the pool of Siloam, and wash, and I went and washed, and I received sight."* He gave credit to the One who deserved it. All the glory and praise was for Christ. Why should we not also recognize our blessings, the source of them, and be demonstrative in offering thanks to God for what we receive, just as was true of this man?

### **Loyalty**

Last, we must mention his loyalty to Christ even when few others were showing such loyalty. This is inseparable from his courage and faith. He was not loyal to the Pharisees, or even to his parents before he was loyal to the Lord. Even when prodded and harassed, he maintained his loyalty to Jesus. Possibly, this was because he had an open mind and was subject to being convinced of truth. We do not do well to allow anything to

distract us from looking to Christ and being loyal to Him.

Is it not worth our while to develop such characteristics as courage, faith, gratitude and loyalty? But the story is not quite over. There is something else to learn.

In verses 35-38, when Jesus and the man met again, Jesus asked him, "*Dost thou believe on the Son of God?*" The man responded, "*Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?*" His response might be paraphrased, "Just show me where He is. I am ready to believe because I know what I know." When Jesus identified Himself to the man as God's Son, the man immediately answered, "*Lord, I believe.*"

That day proved to be a day of great physical and spiritual gain for this man born blind. Those who will be of the same disposition as he can make today a day of great gain also.

† † † † †

## ***Brethren, Lie Not***

There once was a program called "To Tell The Truth." Surely, we recognize this is a noble and righteous deed suggested by the name of this program. The Scripture teaches, "*Thou shalt not bear false witness*" (Matthew 19:18). You may think it strange that church people need such a lesson as this because they ought to know better than to lie. But do we always act according to what we know? Lying is often excused and considered sophisticated. The government claims the right to lie; religions have the doctrine of mental reservation; and how many consider it all right to lie, if for a good cause? The end justifies the means with some people. Such a lesson is not needed just among the rough and uncouth people of the world, but few of that element will listen. Obviously, Christians need the lesson also because the inspired New Testament writers had much to say about it. Even those who are not liars need to be strengthened in speaking the truth.

### **Classify Sin?**

Some classify sin as bad and not so bad. This is without Biblical authority, but it is commonplace. Sin by others is bad

while sin by ourselves is not so bad. Regarding lying, some talk about "white lies" and "black lies." But a lie is a lie. The average member of the church will look with contempt on fornication, murder, armed robbery, drunkenness and such like sins. But how many are disturbed over envy, jealousy, vengeance, gossip, greed, covetousness, and even lying? Is truth respected as is ought to be?

It is true that the immediate effects of some sins are worse than others. But sin in any form is a transgression of God's law (First John 3:4). We have not the right to look with liberality on lying and liars. Liars are listed alongside the worst kind of people in First Timothy 1:10.

Lessons against lying are needed because of the harm that a lie does. Good people may believe lies to their own destruction (First Kings 13). Congregations have been divided due to lies. Many church problems are aggravated because of lies. Homes are broken, friendships destroyed, suspicion, doubt, pain, hate and unhappiness are all created by lies. Reputations are ruined beyond total recovery because of lies. (Character cannot be destroyed by lies unless the one who is the victim of lies allows it). Church leaders and their families are branded viciously by lies. Some lie in order to defame and damage others while others lie through carelessness and indifference. But the tongue that lies defiles the liar. It can cause the soul to be lost.

There are at least three ways to promote lies. (1) Make a lie. (2) Believe a lie. (3) Repeat a lie. Let us consider each of these.

### **Creating Lies**

To create or invent an untruth, being the origin of something false, a misleading half-truth in order to deceive and mislead is to give birth to a lie. One could say, "I have not seen that man drunk in a long time." One would think that the man may have been seen drunk at some time. But the truth may be that the man has never been drunk, but the way something is reported gives rise to a deception that is destructive to the man. Never start a lie in any manner. Speak the truth.

### **Receiving Lies**

To be a willing recipient of a lie is to give the appearance of condoning it and agreeing with it. We may not always know when we have been told a lie, but it is always our right, even our

duty, to question what we hear. The Lord said, "*At the mouth of two or three witnesses let every word be established.*" (Matthew 18:16). Especially is this necessary when you hear something degrading about another. Talebearers, scandalmongers are too numerous to ignore the need of verification. Do not be too quick to swallow all you hear lest you become an accomplice in propagating a lie.

### **Repeating Lies**

Certainly, you are a liar when you repeat a lie. It is sinful to make, receive or repeat a lie. We can condemn ourselves if not careful in such matters.

May we suggest some practical rules about repeating tales. (1) As already suggested, make sure the report is true. (2) If it is not true, do not believe it or repeat it. You might be called to confirm what you have said. It would be embarrassing for others to prove you are lying. (3) Even if some report is bad and confirmed, is it of real benefit for it to be repeated? Especially if the report can hurt the church or some brother or sister, why do we feel obligated to spread it abroad? Sometimes we have to distinguish between a person and the cause of Christ. Some person may not be what he ought to be, but shall we expose that person if it is going to do harm to the cause of Christ, maybe uprooting much good that the person in fault has done, even discrediting good efforts he has previously made? Once you let some report go forward, it is impossible to stop.

How much of this world's ills would die,  
If all that entered ear or eye,  
Would not escape from below the nose,  
And we could learn our mouths to close?

### **Divine Teaching**

Turn your attention to the following passages. "*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.*" (Exodus 20:16). "*Thou shalt not take up a false report; put not thy hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness... Keep far from a false matter.*" (Exodus 23:1,7). "*Ye shall not steal; neither shall ye deal falsely, nor lie one to another.*" (Leviticus 19:11). "*Thou shalt not bear false witness.*" (Matthew 19:18). "*Wherefore, putting away falsehood, speak ye truth one with another; for we*

are members one of another.” (Ephesians 4:25). *“Lie not one to another; seeing that ye have put off the old man with its doings, and have put on the new man, that is being renewed unto knowledge after the image of him that created him.”* (Colossians 3:9,10). *“Blessed are they that wash their robes, that they may have the right to come to the tree of life, and may enter in by the gates into the city. Without are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one that loveth and maketh a lie.”* (Revelation 22:14,15). Such sentiments can be multiplied from the Word of God.

Falsehoods are works of darkness. Paul wrote, *“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.”* (Ephesians 5:11). Lying is much like the whisperer, slanderer, gossip. They are all cut from the same cloth and from a similar pattern.

### **Child Of Satan**

To be a liar is to show yourself to be a child of the devil. John 8:44, *“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.”* Listen to Revelation 21:8, *“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”*

Lying ruined Ananias and Sapphira. *“But Peter said, Ananias, Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?... And Ananias hearing these words fell down and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things.”* His wife came later and showed her complicity in the lie with her husband and she also was taken up dead (Acts 5:3-10).

### **Denying Christ**

The lie that will surely damn is the denial that Jesus is the Christ. *“I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. 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 2:21,21).*

“Truth” is such a noble word, a divine concept, a righteous pattern for life. *“Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”* (John 8:32). Since truth makes one free, lies place one in bondage. Would anyone contest the idea that God expects His children to tell the truth and all who hear can be assured that what they hear is true? Brethren, lie not.

† † † † †

## ***Three Great Gifts***

The theme of giving is as broad and beautiful as the religion of Christ because so much of the faith is based on giving. Too often we think of giving only in terms of monetary gifts, but there is far more involved in Christian giving than that.

Giving is as old as humanity. We read of Cain and Abel giving sacrificial gifts to God. Abraham gave a tithe to Melchizedek. The wise men brought gifts to the Christ as an infant. Mary anointed the feet of Jesus with costly ointment. Barnabas sold land and gave the money to the apostles.

A preacher once requested of a rich man a financial donation. The rich man responded that all the church ever thought was asking for money. He said, “You make Christianity just giving, giving, giving.” The preacher responded, “Thank you for such an excellent commentary and definition of Christianity. If it were not for the practice of giving there would be no Christianity.”

The very existence of the faith is dependent on the great gifts that have been offered. But did you ever consider that the continuation of Christianity is also dependent on giving? It came into being with gifts and it is sustained with gifts. The ultimate rewards are also gifts.

### **God's Gift**

Notice the gift that brought Christianity into reality. It was God who gave. *“He spared not his own Son.”* (Romans 8:32). This gift of God was made because of God's love for sinful humanity. **It was** not given in return for our love because he first love us.

(John 4:19). *"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).

### **Christ's Gift**

Christ's gift was His own precious life. The power of salvation is the blood of the Son of God. He left His home in glory to become a human in order to be the sacrifice for man's sins. *"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, thou he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."* (Second Corinthians 8:9). He gave His life, His blood, that we could be ransomed and made spiritually alive from the death of sin.

His death was a shameful one on the cross, at least, shameful in the eyes of His enemies. Yet, it was glorious in the eyes of God and those who trust Him. *"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."* (First Corinthians 1:23,24). There is no more painful manner of dying than that which the Lord endured. While some despise the gift, those who are redeemed are grateful.

His death was entirely for man's benefit, not His own. He died in our stead (First Corinthians 15:3). It was the just dying for the unjust (First Peter 3:18). He tasted of death for every man (Hebrews 2:9). Justice demanded the penalty to be paid even as mercy called for opportunity for man to be saved. Justice and mercy met at the cross (Romans 3:24).

Jesus was sent by the Father and did that for which He was sent, willingly, and of His own accord. He humbled Himself; He emptied Himself; He gave Himself. If it had not been for giving, God's giving, Christ's giving, there would be no way of salvation offered to mankind.

### **Man's Gift**

In addition to the two gifts of Deity there is also the gift man must give, and that is himself to God. Whereas the first two gifts made Christianity possible, it avails nothing for a person until that person makes his gift. Though we can be reconciled to God because of Deity's gifts, we will not be reconciled without our gift of obedience to God (Second Thessalonians 1:8,9). To stress

man's part in God's plan for saving man in no way diminishes or dims the glory of God or His saving power. Actually, it emphasizes it and glorifies the name of Christ. Christ requires obedience and without it He is not our Savior (Hebrews 5:9). Obedience is a demonstration of love (John 14:15). When we obey we are giving Him the credit for salvation rather than attempting to earn salvation by our own merit.

Our gift is to be ourselves. So strong and devoted are we to be that service to Christ dominates and regulates our life. We deny self (Luke 9:23), and seek to please God, giving as did those reported in Second Corinthians 8:5, *"...but first gave their own selves to the Lord."*

The Christian does not belong to himself but has been purchased by the blood of Christ (First Corinthians 6:19,20; Acts 20:28). No one ever belonged to another more than the Christian is to belong to the Christ.

### **What This Means**

What does it mean to give yourself? How can one tell whether the expected gift has really been given? This is determined by what one seeks in life. Does he seek purity, kindness and peace? Is he longsuffering, doing good works, attending to matters of a spiritual nature even before matters of the physical and material? Does he live above the sinful level of this world, having his heart set on things above? What are his ideals in life, his aims, and goals? What does one put first in line of his priorities? Matthew 6:33, *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."*

If one cannot answer such questions harmoniously with the will of God then he stands in desperate need of adjusting his life, attitude, manners and ambitions to align himself with God. One cannot come to the Lord acceptably if he comes with reservations. We are to be living sacrifices (Romans 12:1), that which is totally given to another.

As we think of these great gifts, God's gift, Christ's gift, man's gift, it is obvious that Christianity involves much more than gifts of money, does it not? Monetary considerations are included as a part of Christianity, but that giving is to reflect the first three. Once these three gifts are recognized and appreciated as occupying center stage, the monetary giving expected of Christians is a natural consequence.

## Love

There is something common about each of these three gifts. Have you noted what it is? Each of them are prompted and motivated by love. God loved; Christ loved; man is to love. Love is that spiritual quality that is divine in nature, finding its manifestation in giving. That which is like God can properly be exalted in the most magnanimous terms.

To summarize briefly, these three gifts, each one brought forth from the same spiritual trait of love, are tremendous factors in the religion of which the Son of God is Founder and Foundation. But our concern is the impression these truths have on us. We had nothing to do with the giving done by the Father and Son. It was entirely an act of Deity. But we do have to make the decision regarding the giving of ourselves. Will we take advantage of the gifts of Deity or shall we reject what is offered, which means rejection of eternal life in heaven?

We accept what God gives by rendering obedience to the commands of the gospel, that requires faith in Christ, repentance from sins, confession of that faith, and baptism in water for the remission of sins in the name of, or by the authority of, Jesus Christ.

When the invitation of Christ is extended, when an opportunity to come to Him is offered, people stand at a crossroads, and they must make a decision. The attempt to not make a decision is to make the decision not to come to Christ and a decision not to be saved. Only a decision to render obedience will suffice. If you have not taken advantage of these gifts of Deity, and lack giving of yourself, why should you deprive yourself any longer of that which God offers?

† † † † †

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accordingly when called to do so. God has promised we can overcome what trouble may envelope us. What we cannot overcome we can successfully endure.

Having trouble is commonplace, but having comfort is God's grace. Will you come to Christ and face life by His side? Render obedience to the gospel and know the comfort Deity offers to all.

† † † † †

# ***Spiritual Ignorance***

**First Corinthians 2:6-9, “Howbeit we speak wisdom among *them* that are perfect; yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of *the* princes of this world, that come to nought; but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory; which none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”**

It may seem strange that lessons are presented to Christian people about spiritual ignorance. It would seem more appropriate that such thoughts be directed toward those who are irreligious. The truth is that both need such lessons. Unfortunately, the irreligious seldom will allow thought of this nature to fall upon their ears. They studiously avoid them. Those who are Christians have shown an interest in such matters and are more inclined to listen. The lesson is designed to answer the question, “Why learn the message of the Bible?”

As the text points out, the gospel, formerly a mystery and known only to God, was being preached. Some were accepting it, but many others were rejecting it. But the matter under consideration concerns those who remain ignorant about it. Spiritual ignorance refers to the ignorance people have about God, man's need for God, God's provisions for man, and God's revelation of this information. Such ignorance is deep and widespread. To even a casual observer it should be glaringly obvious that more and more people know less and less about the Bible and what it teaches.

## **Not An Easy Answer**

Any attempt to present a quick and easy answer as to why we should learn the message of the Bible will not be forthcoming because it will fall short. But to make a summary statement, a concise one, that might encompass the many things that can be said and must be expanded, we would say that spiritual ignorance will cause people to live sinful, godless, irresponsible, degenerate and unsuccessful lives while spiritual knowledge will lead them in paths of righteousness, decency, morality, responsibility and eventually heaven rather than hell.

It is to be doubted that we can adequately measure the

immense evil that reigns due to spiritual ignorance. When we look at the homes we see divorce, separation, stress, strain, unhappiness, unfaithfulness, disturbances that adversely affect young and old. Consider the cities as well as the rural areas infected with crime, gangs, drugs, rape, murder and every form of immorality. Can we begin to measure the havoc caused by the consumption of alcoholic beverages that degrade every nook and corner of society where it flows, and even brings terror and destruction on many who do not traffic in this drug, this poison, this defilement of humankind?

The marketing of sin is big business in every community in the form of pornography, prostitution, gambling being legalized in more and more places, graft, political corruption, and all the other notable marks of a people who have lost their way, forsaken their standards, and adopted the manners of the servants of the devil. One cannot even go into a restaurant to buy a meal without being served huge doses of profanity, vulgarity, indecency in dress and conversation. Everything from sodomy to murder of unborn children (called abortion) characterizes and gives evidence of spiritual ignorance. The sad truth is that the avalanche of evil is growing even as it already floods society.

## **The Gospel**

How would the gospel affect all of this? The gospel is the doctrine of Christ. The doctrine of Christ provides a guide for the home, including each member of the family. It will develop love, consideration, morality, alongside *"doing unto others..."*, teaching respect, honor, truthfulness, modesty, cleanliness and personal responsibility to do right. The gospel would rid the world of the consumption of alcoholic beverages, the no good hypocritical so called "Christians" notwithstanding. The greatest friend any nation has is the faithful Christian. He promotes good citizenship, and is an influence for good in everything he does. *"Righteousness exalts a nation..."* and righteousness is the Christian's business and purpose for living. The vice that plagues the streets, terrorizes communities, degrades all would find scarce ground for cultivation if spiritual knowledge replaced spiritual ignorance.

Because the Jews knew not God's law and respected not the teaching He had given them, they crucified Christ. There has not been a greater crime committed by people than the brutal and unjust death of the Son of God at man's hands. It was a

most defiant and satanic display of impiety. If ignorance can, and did, produce that, it can and will produce all kinds of evil of which the mind can imagine.

### **Honest, Sincere, Naive, Blind**

Many honest and sincere people are going about life naively and blindly as to the reality of the spiritual destruction around them. They are gullible while travelling the path to their own destruction because of spiritual ignorance. The lack of knowledge of the Bible causes men and women, boys and girls, to follow after false ways, even though they may be seeking salvation, even expecting it, but attempting to obtain it from sources that never have and never will produce it. They listen to men, follow after the human doctrines they have been taught, never searching the Scriptures to see if their faith is the Biblical faith. They have presumed and assumed that what they think is true and never even will allow the possibility that ignorance, rather than knowledge, is their plight. This naive and undisturbed attitude contributes to the perpetuation of spiritual ignorance and all the attending havoc it causes.

### **What Ignorance Does**

Spiritual ignorance has even caused churches that once were strong and active in the cause of Christ to be dashed to pieces on the rocks of internal strife, apostasy and digression either to the left or to the right. While members would "go along" wheresoever they may have been led, they did not check with God's Word as they moved. Doctrines were adopted, practices followed, that never had root in God's Word. Failure to put into practice the truth that they had learned opened the door for the invasion of error that eventually carried them away into apostasy. Spiritual ignorance on the part of a church's membership can and will prevent salvation while spiritual knowledge means salvation.

### **Prevent And Correct**

Spiritual knowledge is essential to know how to enter into fellowship with Deity, how to be forgiven of sins, how to work and worship God's way, how to treat other people, and how to avoid pitfalls, and how to make corrections when they are

needed. The gospel has both a preventive and corrective element. There is the positive side of God's will that must be followed and a negative side that must be heeded. Knowledge of truth could have prevented many sins from ever being thought or committed. How many times have you heard people say, maybe you have said it yourself, "If I had know then what I know now I would not have done as I did." Does not this tell you the value of spiritual knowledge?

The old adage, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" is a good one, and should be heeded. Spiritual ignorance abandons you to the wiles of the devil while spiritual knowledge equips you for the battles of life. Action without intelligence is merely action, not intelligent action. To act intelligently we must have knowledge. We should cram our minds until overrunning with spiritual information of God's revelation.

Many lives have been scarred and ruined, that will ever remain that way, that could have been productive of good except for spiritual ignorance. Lacking proper training, receiving improper information, never coming to know what really matters, unable to establish godly priorities, has been the sad experience of untold thousands. Spiritual ignorance or spiritual knowledge determines spiritual destruction or spiritual life.

## **The Word**

God's Word is our lamp and light, a guide to joy, peace, usefulness, purpose, accomplishment and success in this life. But it leads the spirit of man beyond the time when the spirit leaves the body in physical death. The message of the Bible takes man into the realm beyond, even through death, the resurrection, the judgment and eternity. Too few are following this guide and their lives, as well as the lives they influence, are miserable, unhappy, distraught, sinful and wicked. They will not only be failures in those things that really matter while on earth, but they shall suffer entrance into hell forever.

To fail to learn the message of the Bible is criminal. Ignorance of the message of God contributes to every evil you can imagine. Your influence is to encourage others to also remain ignorant, to scorn, scoff, ridicule and otherwise set aside the only message upon which people can confidently rely to raise mankind to the level God wants. Today, even as you read these words, you are lending yourself to spiritual knowledge if you will give heed to what we are saying. It is our prayer that by reading

these words your interest in spiritual knowledge will be even further aroused and your appetite for the will of the Lord will be whetted and enlarged.

† † † † †

## ***The Troubled Heart***

None of us are exempt from trouble in this life. Job 14:1, "*Man that is born of woman is of few days and is full of trouble.*" This is commonplace to the human family. Often trouble breaks the heart because of its intensity and magnitude. There are no doors, no bars, no bolts, no locks that can forever keep out trouble in life. It comes to the rich, poor, high, low, young, old, anyone, everyone, sooner or later. Like death, it is no respecter of persons. We have our own troubles, and we see others as they wrestle with their troubles.

We do not want to leave the impression that life is only trouble because that is far from the truth. But it is trouble that causes grief to the heart that we are studying in this lesson. Much sorrow and trouble goes unseen by men because it is known only to God and the one with the troubled heart. Most of us are blessed in so many ways that we are not always aware of the serious problems in life that others have to face and bear. We are often shocked to learn the burdens that others have that we probably have never experienced and did not even know they were experiencing. It is not uncommon that people cover their troubles under a facade of pretending that all is well when such is really not the case. An uncomplaining disposition and a cheerful countenance often hides a multitude of grief. Who knows what pain is attempting to break forth but is suppressed with a patient and godly attitude of endurance? But we are aware that this world is a place of trouble.

### **Causes**

What are some of the major causes of a troubled heart? Is it not such things as the death of a loved one? Is that not a crucial obstacle in life? Even the disciples of Jesus were made sorry when they learned that Jesus would die. Recall the sorrow of the Lord Himself when Lazarus died, and He saw the mourning

of others He loved. Most have experienced this kind of trouble in the passing from life of someone who was near and dear to them. How the heart aches because of this tragic occurrence.

It is real trouble to be misunderstood by others or to have your motives and actions misread and impugned. Often trouble arises because we misunderstand others. Both we and they are hurt. It is valuable when we can secure a good understanding and meeting of the minds with others. Many problems have been created, feelings hurt, friendships harmed or destroyed over such things.

What is more shattering than to learn of the lack of trustworthiness in something or someone in whom you have placed your trust? Some have suffered the unfaithfulness of a mate, or a friend, or some associate on whom they had looked with confidence. Judas, one of the twelve, betrayed the trust Jesus had in him. Having your faith broken after you have depended so confidently is disturbing to the mind and distressing to the heart. It even extends beyond that which has proven itself untrustworthy. It can even cause you to be suspicious of other things and people wherein you have placed trust. A dark and dismal cloud overshadows all of life when this tragedy becomes a reality.

Many go through life burdened with insecurity. Insecurity causes personal pain, but more than that, can often provoke worse things as one seeks to rid himself of insecurity. Many who have been materially insecure have turned to robbery. Others being personally insecure about themselves have resorted to immorality, drunkenness, drugs and other sinful conduct. The dread and fear of the future, when nothing seems anchored, when all around you seem to be uprooted and overturned, can cause unhappiness and trouble the weary heart.

We could continue to mention such things as sickness, losses of various kinds, but surely the point is sufficiently made that trouble exists and it strikes all around us, even upon us at times.

## **Guilt**

But nothing causes more trouble to the sincere heart than the guilt of sin. We grieve over our sins and the sins of others because sin is that which alienates us from God. Think of the grief of Peter after he had denied Christ and the Lord had looked upon him. Think of the sorrow in the heart of the prodigal son when he was still in the foreign country and swine

pits. Can one adequately describe the torture of a guilty conscience?

Have you ever known the trial of seeing your own flesh and blood renounce God's truth and pursue error? Do we not read of violators of the civil law who rejoice once they are finally caught, having borne the burden of guilt and the pain of conscience for so long? Sin brings trouble, especially to those who are aware of right and wrong. But at least such people show a spark of sensitivity toward sin while many can sin with impunity and go their way as if nothing has been done. They will live deceived and die damned.

### **Source Of Comfort**

Is there no comfort for the troubled heart? Yes, there is. God is the God of comfort (Second Corinthians 1:3). The Holy Spirit was identified as the Comforter (John 14:26). Jesus taught, "*Let not your heart be troubled.*" (John 14:1). Deity offers the troubled heart of man the relief and consolation that is needed and for which man yearns.

Our Savior, having been tempted in all points as we are (Hebrews 4:15), speaks words of comfort founded on His Deity as well as His experience as a human being. He is fully understanding of us. He can sympathize to the utmost with mankind as he struggles with those things that would bend and even break him in life. Is it not comforting in itself to hear words from others in times of our distress, "I know how you feel?" Especially are we comforted when we know that the one who speaks has also endured similar trials that we are undergoing. Herein is the perfection of our High Priest and Advocate, Jesus Christ. While we seek to comfort one another the best we know how, Christ can comfort with knowledge and completeness that none other can offer.

Let us consider John 14 for some instruction in this area of thought. "*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.*" (Verse 1). A life built on faith in Christ is one that can find serenity and tranquility in the midst of the storms of life. He recognizes the temporary nature of life, even the passing of trouble eventually. It all gives way to the power of that which is higher and better.

### **Hope**

*"In my Fathers house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."* (Verse 2). Because of such words we have hope which is an anchor to the soul (Hebrews 6:19). We can be assured that Deity will keep His Word to us. There is that day before us when the Lord Jesus shall come for us. Meanwhile, we bask in the warmth of His promise that sustains us when under fire from trouble. *"Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted."* (Matthew 5:4). While this blessedness speaks more directly to those who mourn over sin, the fact of comfort to the mourning is stated.

*"And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way. Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."* (Verses 4-6). We can be comforted with the wisdom and knowledge of Christ, the way. The doubt of Thomas concerning the future and the way to go was dissolved with the certainty of Jesus and His instruction. When one will heed the statements of the Lord and follow thereafter, this knowledge brings confidence and contentment. It is a salve to the weary and a source of relief to the chaffing so common in life.

Passing to verses 13,14, *"And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it."* This was spoken to His apostles and dealt directly with their apostolic office. But the promise Deity gives is that attention will be given to the expressions of humanity. This in itself is amazing! Do we not have a similar assurance that God will hear and answer our prayers if we be faithful children of His? Will not God keep His Word and do what is best for us? Does not the knowledge that we can capture the attention of God and focus it upon ourselves, even on our problems, provide us strength to encounter whatever we are called to meet?

*"There is grace to help in our time of need  
For our Friend above is a Friend indeed.  
We may cast on Him every grief and care,  
There is always a blessing, a blessing in prayer.*

*When our songs are glad with the joys of life,  
When our hearts are sad with its ills and strife,*

When the powers of sin would the world ensnare,  
There is always a blessing, a blessing in prayer."

We have experienced the relief received when we talk to someone who cares and wants to help. It is that way, even more, when we approach the throne on high and seek comfort from Him. God hears; God cares; God answers.

### **Our Comfort**

Verse 18, *"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."* Again, this was to His apostles regarding His promise of the Holy Spirit upon them. But we are also promised that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit will dwell with us. We make a serious mistake to conclude that we have the presence of Deity in the same measure as did the apostles.

We would be neglectful not to mention the comfort in trouble from the knowledge that we are loved. It means so much to any person to know that others love him or her. How much more does it calm the troubled spirit to know that God loves us. *"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."* (Verse 21). Notice the condition of being the beneficiary of that love. We must keep His commandments. To refuse to obey is to declare a lack of love (Verse 24). Earlier Christ said, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* (John 14:15).

### **Endurance**

We could extend the list of sources of comfort to include God's providence, protection, guidance through His Word and other blessings. But one other we will include that is found in First Corinthians 10:13. It may well be one of the most comforting assurances given to the Christian in God's revelation. *"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."*

What this is telling us is, "There is nothing that shall happen this say that God and I together cannot handle." This is far easier to say than to practice. But we are confident it is true whether we live accordingly or not. God help us to live

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## **Getting Fired**

June 1987 marks the completion of thirty-five years that I have attempted to preach the gospel. There have not been but five churches during all those years where I did what is often called "full time" work, which means I have been privileged to stay rather reasonable periods where we worked. Not once was I fired. It is not because some did not want to fire me. That subject was the topic of discussion several times. One time I resigned probably just a few weeks before I might have been fired. But when I resigned it enraged that eldership so much that I became the victim of some of the most vicious treatment experienced in my life. Looking back on it, however, and seeing the direction that eldership was determined to go, I should not have been ashamed at all to have been fired by such as they.



But many good and sound preacher brethren are fired. When I consider the long list of those who have suffered such things, and realize why many of them were fired, knowing of their soundness and high moral character, and seeing the digression that has swept the church in recent years, I conclude being fired is often a compliment.

\* \* \* \* \*

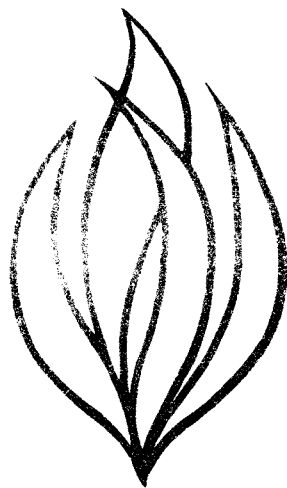
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# A Burning Fire



“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 Rich Fool**

Luke 12:16-21, "*And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.*"

The word "fool" has two meanings, according to Webster's Dictionary. It means a person devoid of reason and intelligence. It also means one who acts in a foolish or unwise manner. Obviously, the last "fool" is not lacking in intelligence, but is unwise. Such is the man of the parable.

We must be careful how we use the word "fool." Christ warned in the Sermon on the Mount, "*...and whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.*" (Matthew 5:22). This is to speak of someone with hatred and contempt, even with a desire that their soul be damned. Obviously, the Lord is not using the term in this fashion in the parable, but has reference to what He presented as a foolish and unwise action that manifested a distressingly mistaken attitude.

## **Bible Fools**

The Bible describes a fool in many passages. "*The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.*" (Psalm 14:1). The book of Proverbs gives many references to fools as those who despise instruction and wisdom. Proverbs 10:8 speaks of a prating fool while Ecclesiastes 5:3 reads, "*A fool's voice is known by multitude of words.*" Proverbs 12:15, "*The way of a fool is right in his own eyes.*" Proverbs 14:16, "*The fool rageth and is confident.*" Other proverbs mention meddling fools and how fools utter all their mind. There is a great array of teaching in the poetic books of the Old Testament regarding fools, foolishness and their manners.

## **Possessions**

Why is the man in the parable called a fool? Let us not falsely accuse him. We should consider some of the reasons why he was not called a fool. It was not because he had possessions. Men of God have sometimes been men with wealth, such as Abraham, Job, David, Solomon and even Joseph of Arimathea. There is no inherent virtue in poverty any more than there is inherent evil in riches. There is no shame or virtue in either per se. The love of money is certainly sinful (First Timothy 6:10).

The parables of the talents teaches people they should use their talents and abilities to the best advantage. If one has a talent for making money, why should he not do it, assuming he acts honestly, and uses what he earns in a righteous way? There is nothing to indicate that the man prospered due to dishonesty. The Scripture says the ground brought forth plentifully. He had a good year in his work as a farmer. Doubtless, as is usually the case, other farmers had also prospered along with him, although part of his prosperity might be attributed to good management and diligent effort. While there are those who gain wealth in a dishonest way, it is unfair to think everyone who is rich has been dishonest. That was not the case with the man of our study. There are dishonest poor people, too.

## **Conservative**

He was not a fool because he was conservative of what he had gained. There is no virtue in wastefulness and extravagance. His barns were inadequate and he wisely acted to erect some larger ones. It would have been foolish for him to allow the elements to destroy his harvest because he would not house it properly.

The story of the prodigal son condemns wastefulness. Joseph made preparation for the lean years in Egypt by storing grain in bins during the years of plenty. This showed wisdom, not foolishness. Even Christ cause the food left over from feeding the multitudes to be gather. John 6:12, *"Gather up the broken pieces which remain over, that nothing be lost."* We could compliment the man for preserving his bountiful harvest.

## **Provision**

He was not foolish because he made provision for the future.

Some have a mistaken idea that it is wrong to prepare for the future as if this is to doubt the providence of God. "God will take care of you," they say. What they misunderstand is that God has already taken care of us many times, but we have squandered what He provided and failed to prepare for the future with what He gave us. Somehow we expect Him to provide for us again even after we have wasted His provision. We should not "live up" everything when we could lay some aside for the future. In our labor from day to day we earn the necessary provisions for each day so we can give to those who need, but also that they might care for ourselves when that time comes when we can no longer labor and make provision. Some years ago some people even thought having life insurance was sinful. That is foolish. We shall either live or die with the passing of time. With one of these eventualities before us, we act wisely to make ready for the inescapable. This is not doubting God's providence but using God's providence.

### **Self**

This man was a fool because he was egotistical. Thirteen times in the account he referred to himself, what he had, what he had done, what he would do. He failed to realize that it was not merely by his own hand that he had prospered, but every good gift had come from God (James 1:17). He just had a high opinion of himself, more than was warranted. He failed to give credit where credit was due. Actually, none of us do much of anything except that we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us and made our accomplishments possible. How self-centered we are to praise ourselves and not realize God, and others, have contributed to whatever success we enjoy.

The religion of Christ is a religion that requires the denial of self. Luke 9:23, *"And he said unto all, If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me."* To deny self means that we no longer follow our own will and way, but that of Christ. No longer do we heap praise on self, but give glory to God. Paul's instruction to the Philippians was this, *"...doing nothing through faction or through vainglory, but in lowliness of mind, each counting other better than himself."* (Philippians 2:3). This man thought too highly of himself, contrary to the teaching of Paul, *"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among*

*you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think..." (Romans 12:2).*

### **It Was Not His**

This man considered these possessions as his. He spoke of *"my fruits... my barns... my goods..."* Do we not yet know that we came into the world with nothing and that we shall leave the same way? (First Timothy 6:7). Nothing here is really our own except the use of things for a while. We are stewards of that which has been placed in our care. What we have is a loan and we shall be held accountable for its use. We should consider what wealth of any measure that we control to be tools in our hands to do the Lord's will. If we so consider material things there might be many things we now buy that we would never buy, and direct more of them directly to the cause of Christ. First Corinthians 4:2, *"Here, moreover, it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."* This man of the parable forgot, or possibly never learned, the true relationship between a man and "his" money. Psalm 24:1, *"The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof."*

### **Confusion**

Again, this man confused his physical need with his spiritual need. He said, *"Soul, take thine ease."* He made the same mistake many today seem inclined to make and that is to assume that things being well with us personally and materially means things are well spiritually. This is not necessarily so.

This man expected his soul's welfare to be proportionate to his material welfare. He placed his confidence in his wealth. This is the very sin Paul warns Christians to avoid. First Timothy 6:17, *"Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy."* Food for the soul is not the same as food for the body. The emphasis of many is the physical side of life to the crowding out of concern for the things of the spirit.

His attitude, *"Take thine ease..."* indicates that he was going to quit doing, but bask lazily in the abundance of what he had accumulated. He was going to use it on his own desires and whims without regard for anything else, even the need to keep producing as he had opportunity. We should not confuse rest

from our labors after life is over with rest from labor while it is still day and the night has not yet come. This man was ready to quit. Can a Christian ever quit in his labor for the Lord? Is there a retirement age for the child of God? If so, when is it? Where do you read about it? This man had the attitude that he had what he wanted, all he wanted, and the devil could just take the rest and leave him alone.

Christ once told the rich young ruler, "*Go and sell what you have and give to the poor.*" (Mark 10:21). But the man went away sorrowful because he had much riches, and evidently placed too much trust in them to separate himself from them even to be a disciple of Christ. He had to decide between Christ having first place or his wealth, and he made a foolish choice. This man of the parable of our study also had a misplaced trust, misunderstood what is really important, misconceived his mission in life, and failed to recognize his own accountability.

### **Folly**

It is plain to see from this account that laying up treasures upon this earth rather than treasures in heaven proves disastrous (Matthew 6:19,20). We should profit from his mistakes and not fall into the same snare. Think less of self and more of Christ. Recognize who owns everything and the seriousness of our responsibility in using what is given into our care. Prepare for the life hereafter and not center ourselves exclusively on the here and now. Remember that eternal life is not to be ours on the basis of what we have, but what we are. Food for the soul is more important than even food for the body. As Jesus had taught just prior to this parable, "*Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*" (Luke 12:15).

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brotherhood when they need not be surprised at all. The indications are usually very pronounced in advance of someone's departure from truth. It seems that so many of us, possibly preferring it was not true, just shut our eyes and hope it goes away. But that doesn't work. Surprises happen, but many times are unwarranted, if only we would be honest with the evidences.

**JWB**

# **What Does The Resurrection Mean To You?**

There are many interesting facts in the world to know. Do you know that Sir John Lubbock was an English scientist? Or were you aware that the Nile River is 4,000 miles long? Maybe you are informed that the square root of 49 is 7. Most are very aware that April 15th is the final day for filing income tax forms. What do you know about America's preparedness for war? Do these questions sound strange coming from the pulpit?

All of these are facts. Some mean something to you while others are relatively meaningless and you really do not care one way or the other. What do you care about Sir John Lubbock, the length of the Nile River, or the square root of any number? But the deadline for tax forms has more meaning, and the state of readiness of our nation for emergencies is of vital concern to every citizen. What makes the difference? It is the effect they have on you and to what extent they have a bearing on your life.

There are other facts revealed to us in the Bible, such as information regarding One named Jesus of Nazareth who came to this earth from heaven, lived a perfect life, died on the cross, was raised from the dead after three days, ascended into heaven, and now reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords. But what does the fact of the resurrection mean to you?

## **Disbelief**

Many people think it means nothing to them because they do not believe it happened. To them such reports are fairy tales and superstition. To others it means an annual celebration called Easter. It is a time when they go to church, probably one of the few times during the year. For others the Easter period is one of buying clothes, dressing up, doing a large merchantile business, having parties, dances, and making the society columns in the newspapers. For many others, the Easter period is just another holiday season, a time for a brief vacation trip, a visit with kinfolks, or something of that order. That which is called Easter,

which is supposed to mark the resurrection of Christ, is just about that and not much more for many people.

To some very sincere people the Easter season is a reminder of the resurrection of Christ and they make special efforts to observe various religious activities to exalt that event. There are musical programs, plays, prayer meetings, the termination of Lent observance, special religious ceremonies, and it is a very solemn time for them. More than any other time of the year they focus their attention on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The Bible does not teach an annual observance of Christ coming from the tomb, but a weekly memorial to Him that necessarily includes the proclamation that Jesus died, was buried, but was raised from the dead because this memorial is to be observed until He returns. The promise of His return indicates that He did not remain in the tomb but came forth as the Bible teaches. Scripture knows nothing of such religious days as Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Ash Wednesday, Easter Sunday, Lent, or similar observances. When people ask me why we do not take notice of all of these days like many other religious people, the answer is simple and easily understood. We are committed to the Word of God as our authority, respect His Word, and must do what we do "*in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,*" (Colossians 3:17), which means by His authority, and His authority is revealed to us in Scripture and Scripture knows nothing of any of it. It is that plain and simple. There is no divine authority for it. Strange it is that many who make quite a fuss over man-made observances pay little attention to the weekly memorial that God has ordained commemorating Jesus Christ, which is the Lord's Supper.

While all of these religious "*holy days*" are intended to honor the Lord, they are activities that spring from zeal without knowledge. When Christians eat the unleavened bread and drink the fruit of the vine each first day of the week as the early Christians did, they "*shew the Lord's death till he come.*" (First Corinthians 11:26). Praise for the sacrifice of Christ and those other events surrounding it, including the resurrection, are noted in this manner, not with humanly devised days, programs, ceremonies, and the like.

Intending no arrogance whatsoever, true New Testament Christians can readily affirm that the day called Easter has no special significance whatsoever. It has no meaning. It does not affect the Christian nor his relationship with God. This does not

mean the resurrection has no meaning. More than anyone else on earth, the Christian respects the glorious fact of the resurrection of Christ. As already emphasized, the Christian respects that fifty-two times a year, not just on some exclusive designated Sunday called Easter.

### **All To Be Raised**

The meaning of the resurrection is far greater than most realize. It means that all shall someday be raised from the dead. *"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). Upon being raised, all shall stand before Deity for judgment (Second Corinthians 5:10). Those who have thought the resurrection of Christ had no meaning for them, or simply looked upon it in the trite and secular ways we have already mentioned, will then be impressed with the significance of Christ coming forth from the tomb. But their resurrection will be to damnation rather than to life for they have failed to follow the Lord Jesus in this life.

### **Jesus Is Christ**

But what does it mean to you? It should mean what the New Testament teaches that it means. It means that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God (Romans 1:4). By the resurrection we have additional and irrefutable evidence of that reality. The identification of Jesus means that all that He said is true, all He taught must be obeyed, all that He warned had best be heeded, and all He did must be believed. It means that Jesus is the only Savior of mankind, the guide of man in this life, and the One through whom the Father will judge the world in the last day.

### **All Die**

Because of the resurrection of Christ, the meaning takes on more importance when we realize that we all must die (Hebrews 9:27), but that is not the termination of our existence. Death is not our conqueror because we can enjoy victory through Christ, even over death (First Corinthians 15:57).

The significance of the resurrection obviously places the

church in a more exalted light, because the church is built on the very fact that His resurrection confirmed; namely, that He is the Son of God. The significance of the resurrection lies in the basis of our hope for heaven, the assurance of salvation, the fellowship in eternity with Deity.

### **Hereafter**

The resurrection means that there is life after physical death, and now, while we are physically alive, is the time we have to prepare for it. Preparation can only be made by rendering submissive obedience to the gospel of the resurrected Christ. Without proper preparedness there is not that first syllable of hope for one for eternity.

Yes, righteous or unrighteous, all shall be raised, and none shall escape the influence and impact of the resurrection of Christ. What His resurrection ultimately means to anyone depends on their response to Christ.

Jesus once said, *"I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"* (John 11:25,26).

Decide while you have the opportunity, to make the resurrection of Christ mean your home in heaven.

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## ***Getting More From Prayer***

Our subject makes several assumptions that can be readily proved, but with which we shall not be primarily concerned. It assumes God exists; that God hears and answers prayer; that the prayer of the righteous avails much (James 5:16); that prayer must have power sufficiently to move God if offered according to His will and in harmony with His revelation concerning prayer. It is not our goal to discuss the content of an acceptable prayer nor what should be included in prayers. We are concerned with the power of prayer, how that power can be dissipated, and how that power can be used to its fullest.

Prayer is for man's advantage, giving him the opportunity to

converse with God. It enables the faithful child of God to tap a reservoir of blessings that God offers. Prayer is not to inform God, but gives recognition of God as the giver of every good gift (James 1:17). Often we are not as blessed as we could be because we do not pray as we ought and do not get the most from the privilege of prayer. We simply want to make a few suggestions to brethren along this line.

Sometimes people get so discouraged in life they feel and are heard to say, "I guess there is no power on earth to help me." Let me persuade my brethren that there is a power in heaven and a way of reaching that power through prayer. While the efficacy of prayer is not our message here, this we want to underscore because it is a forceful Biblical teaching.

### **Daily Prayer**

May we suggest that you set aside a few moments each day for prayer so you can think and consider the prayer. Thoughtfulness before prayer will bring to mind that for which you should pray and how to pray. A calm and quiet moment of reflection can produce a prayerful attitude. Most of us are just not capable of switching our minds off and on like light switches from one attitude to another. Thinking before praying will assist us to pray with greater sincerity and understanding.

This does not exclude spontaneous prayer, if you can call it that, because the occasions of the day may well call for such prayers. But if we rely only on prayers "at the spur of the moment," is it not likely that there will be much for which we should have prayed that will escape us? If possible, have a time of day near which you determine to offer prayer. The "sweet hour of prayer" will be joyfully anticipated.

### **Keep It Simple**

Whether your prayer is spoken aloud or only in your mind is not really important when we speak of private prayers. But often a spoken prayer has advantages to provoke deeper thought even when we may be alone. Simple and natural words are best. Even in public prayers there should not be a conscious attempt to be "flowery" or oratorical in speech. We may likely use phrases that are often used, and there is no inherent fault in that. But we should be careful to know and mean what is said lest such words become mere repetitious sounds without spiritual

substance. While we do not advocate a flippant conversational language that borders on disrespect, we would advise against a stiff formality that is as burdensome as unwarranted familiarity is obnoxious. Let us pray with sincerity. God knows the heart. He needs not to be impressed with our grammar or abilities to express magnificent phrases. Nor should He be addressed as if we are simply speaking to a fellow human being.

Prayers must reflect respect and reverence in our own language and thoughts. It is a precious moment and one of closeness with God. This can be marred by artificiality. He is our Friend, but He is God. Respect His warmth and His holiness just as we realize our own unworthiness.

### **Constant**

Paul taught, "*Pray without ceasing.*" (First Thessalonians 5:17). Obviously, this does not mean to constantly be in the literal activity of uttering prayers, but has reference to a frame of mind. Prayer denotes a dependence on God and we should know that dependence at all times. We should so live as to "be on speaking terms" with God at all times. This enables us to pray anytime, anywhere, about anything.

Prayers need not be long to be effective. Many short prayers during the day lift us along. But we should try not to confine ourselves to just a few brief expressions without giving longer prayer opportunity.

### **Thanks**

Since prayer is an activity motivated by an attitude and expressive frame of mind, we should be careful not to only make petition in prayer, that is, always just asking. Prayer affords us special opportunity to thank God. Our blessings are so numerous that it will tax the mind to "count your many blessings," but we should attempt to say, "Thank Thee, Heavenly Father," for He is the source of our blessings. It is a mistake to only approach God's throne wanting more and more but having neglected to be grateful for what has already been provided. When we do make petition our requests should not be merely for self without proper regard for others, such as friends, brethren, the lost, sick, bereaved, discourage, any and all who need the prayers of the saints.

## **In Faith**

Prayer must be offered in faith. Tennyson said, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." The Bible teaches, as we have already noted, the efficacy of prayer (James 5:16). But prayer is not some magical set of words. Faith undergirds the power of prayer. Faith changed things in the lives of many of God's faithful recorded in Scripture, both in the Old and New Testaments. To pray without faith is to reduce prayer to nothing but a mental exercise, a psychological experience, indeed, a mockery. We are assured, though we are not always aware just how, that God hears and responds. We do not have to know how He does what He does since our faith is in God and we have confidence in whatever He has told us. He has told us He hears and answers prayer. We must learn to accept the way He answers because He knows more than do we what is His will and what is best for us. We rely on Him without reservation.

## **Obedience**

To get the most from prayer we must be submissive to His will. The attitude expressed by Jesus is that which must occupy our hearts. *"Thy will be done."* We can sever our line of communication with God if we are indifferent and disobedience to His will (Proverbs 28:9; First Peter 3:7). We need not think that God will respond, especially as we demand, when we show contempt for His will. As we must be submissive to His will in our manner of life, having prayed that His will be done rather than our own, we must submit to whatever His answer is. He may grant our prayers as we have requested them, or refuse our petition. He may, in essence, answer with a "Wait," or even answer in ways we never considered. Again, we must rely on the providence of God and may never know precisely the way He works all things. We do not have to know all the mind of God to have confidence in Him.

## **Appropriate**

When we offer our personal or private prayers we may well include matters that would be less fitting if leading a prayer publicly. We have those areas of life that are personal and possibly problems with which we are wrestling that do not

concern others but are vital to us. There are people of our acquaintance for whom we may wish to specifically pray in private prayers that are not known to others. We may wish to include their names in our personal prayers that may not be appropriate in a public prayer. There are personal sins of which others are not aware but known only to God for which we may seek forgiveness. We deprive ourselves of great spiritual values if we neglect private prayers where we can be so open to our Father, the One who knows and understands. There might even be various ones who have chosen to be our enemies for whom we wish to pray that would not be appropriate to mention in public prayer. What an opportunity to develop a forgiving spirit when we pray in private for those who have sinned against us, praying that we will forgive even as God forgives us (Matthew 6:12,14,15). We should make our prayers appropriate to the nature of the prayer.

### **Brief Prayers**

We meet many people in the course of a days events. Do you ever consider praying for some of them, even though you may not know their names or circumstances? One has called such prayers "shot prayers," that is, a brief prayer regarding someone in particular. Whether you like that identification or not, prayers for others, especially for their spiritual welfare, are much in order. The more you pray for others the greater will be the spiritual benefit to yourself. It might even lead you to make an effort to seek their spiritual welfare. Is not this one way of getting more from the opportunity of prayer?

Because these remarks are concerned with means and methods respecting prayer, and merely suggestions to consider, we have not had the occasion to include many Scriptures. The things we have assumed to be accepted are Biblically founded, however. Each of us might offer any number of proper suggestions for getting more from prayer. The better we know what the Word teaches regarding prayer the better able we will be to benefit from prayer.

### **In Christ**

But we must remind everyone that the privilege of prayer implies the right relationship with God. How can one who is not a child of God even properly address the Father? Until one is a

Christian, God is not his spiritual Father. Prayer belongs to the Christian. God might take note of the prayers of others, but whose prayers has He promised to hear and answer? To get the most from prayer we must first accept the need to become a child of God by obeying the gospel. Then we can go individually and alongside our brethren into that beautiful garden of prayer and meet our God through His Son in prayer.

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## ***Traditionalism Or Truth***

Read John 5:1-18 before studying this lesson. Biblical information is essential. Until this time in the ministry of Jesus He had presented Himself in a way that called forth faith from the people and even some of the rulers. His teaching was like nothing they had ever heard because of its content and the authority behind it. There had been miracles of healing and mercy. Most of His work had been done in the provinces of Galilee and Samaria.

Now Jesus came to Jerusalem and ran into conflict with those who were growing jealous of the reception He was receiving. He encountered those who were steeped in their own ways and traditions and would not make allowance for anything He said or did.

From the suggested text we learn several worthwhile lessons, including an expanded knowledge of the compassion, grace and goodness of Jesus. We see the manifestation of His power and willingness to help the sick, wretched and distressed. He gave hope and comfort. But because some of the things which He did had been done on the Sabbath Day He aroused the animosity of others. So we see His exposure of their unfounded traditionalism.

### **A Miracle**

A miracle had been done for an apparently helpless human being who had lived in that sad state for thirty-eight years. He **was** healed, cured, immediately. The man sat by the pool in

Jerusalem called Bethesda. Some thought there was something special about its waters, thinking that an angel would come and trouble the waters, then the first diseased person into the water would be healed of whatever affliction he had. Whether this was true or whether the people just thought it was true we cannot tell, nor is it material to the truths we learn. The man who was healed evidently believed it to be true or he would not have been there. His problem was his inability to get into the water, helpless as he was.

When Jesus saw the situation and the man's desire to be cured, He had mercy on him and simply spoke him well. *"Rise, take up thy bed, and walk."* The man, being made whole, did as Jesus commanded.

This should have brought forth praise and thanksgiving from everyone. It still thrills our hearts today as we read of it. But rejoicing was not the reaction of some. Some found fault with what had been accomplished. Why? It was because it took place on the Sabbath Day and in their misinformed traditions even the doing of good would not be allowed on the Sabbath. Certainly, this man would have been prohibited from carrying his bed if their traditions had been the law. So Jesus had His critics.

These traditionalists thought they had Scripture on their side. They could read from Jeremiah where no burden was to be borne on the Sabbath. In the Old Testament a man had been stoned for gathering sticks for firewood. To them the man had sinned and Jesus had commanded him to sin. So intent were they in their hostility toward Jesus that they persecuted Christ and even sought to slay Him (verse 16).

## **Two Charges**

They made two charges against Jesus, neither of which was true. They claimed He broke the Sabbath, and that He did wrong in claiming to be the Son of God. He did make the claim, but His claim was correct. He was the Son of God, and as such, if He chose, could do whatever He would regarding any law that Deity had made.

But He was not guilty of violating the Sabbath Law. The Sabbath was a day of rest from ordinary tasks, as we learn from Nehemiah and Isaiah. But that did not forbid acts of mercy and goodness. Even opponents recognized that when an ox fell into a pit it could be retrieved on the Sabbath. Labor necessary for mercy to animals was permissible. Certainly that which was

mercy for human beings was permissible. Their erroneous conclusions that caused them to denounce Jesus was because of the human traditions they had erected, not from a proper understanding of the law of God regarding the Sabbath. They showed no concern for their fellowman, were inconsistent in the application of the law of God, and were more concerned about their traditions than man or God's law.

When people get bogged down in their human traditions, misunderstandings and inconsistencies, errors will inevitably follow. Such people find fault with good. They seek such rigidity in following what they consider to be the letter of the law that they miss and dismiss the law itself. Of course, the only way to determine the spirit of the law is what the law says. But to make a law so rigid that compliance with it causes disobedience to some other law of God is to misuse the law. When men devise creeds, manuals, disciples, written or unwritten, that are founded on human traditionalism rather than revealed truth, nothing but nullification of truth can result.

### **Regarding Traditions**

What is the kind of traditionalism that Jesus rebukes? A tradition is something handed down. All traditions are not evil. In fact, we read of the tradition which the apostles taught (Second Thessalonians 3:6). The gospel of Christ being taught from one generation to another is a tradition in the sense that it is handed down. But there are also traditions of men (Colossians 2:8) and traditions which can make the commandments of God of none effect (Matthew 15:6). Jesus did not forbid all traditions, even all traditions handed down from our foreparents of their own making. But whatever conflicted with the law of God or either loosed what God had bound or bound what God had loosed was condemned because it violated God's will.

While we should consider the past and respect the people, ways and manners of the past, we should discern between that which is of man and that which is of God. Believing and doing what ancestors did simply because ancestors believed and did it that way is to bind what ought not be bound. When our ancestors obeyed truth and we obey truth we will believe what they believed and act as they acted. In some matters that allow for human judgments regarding means and methods that may mean we will depart from their traditional ways but not be guilty of violating God's law. Something handed down may be from

God or it may be from human tradition. If some human tradition violates the teaching of the Lord we ought to reject it.

### **Binding The Loosed**

We note the determined way some operate today in binding as law that which God has not bound. We also see others charting new courses trying to “restructure the church.” Some have chosen to make laws regarding the care for the needy that have no foundation in Scripture. Others have declared a set “pattern” for churches cooperating while the Scriptures show that churches cooperated several ways and not in one set pattern. The cry, “This is the way we used to do it,” has retarded many efforts, not because the older was wrong, nor was the newer way wrong, but because some were bound to what had been done and wanted nothing else and others were determined not to do anything like it had been previously done. Having preached in many states I have heard people wail, “We did not do it this way back in Tennessee, or Arkansas, or Alabama, etc.” In matters of human judgment, we should be considerate and charitable in such matters and not try to bind brethren by our human traditions.

Please do not misunderstand. Truth is truth everywhere and it must be upheld. Divinely given tradition must be rigidly observed. But human customs, methods and means are not so binding. The results of unenlightened human traditionalism has been the cause of division among brethren. Ignorance coupled with prejudice combined to take the Jews against Christ. This is a malady that no Christian ought ever produce in the church.

The reasons we need to consider these thoughts are three in number. (1) It is the truth. (2) We must learn to prevent problems if we can. Many pitfalls could have been avoided among brethren in the past if there had existed better knowledge, less prejudice and ignorance. We do not want to stand critical of something good as did those who criticized Jesus. Neither do we want to allow ourselves to become too steeped in human traditions anymore than we want to jump too quickly for something new before we know what is true.

### **Is It Truth?**

Of course, what some call human tradition is often a matter of truth. For example, some today scoff at the refusal to endorse

the modern versions of the Bible and the continued use of the King James Version. The issue regarding the versions, as few of the advocates of modern versions have ever learned, is not merely new versions versus old versions. The issue at stake is truth versus false doctrines contained in the modern versions. Truth and error are at stake, not merely a new or old version. We are amazed at how many "scholars" just cannot seem to get the real issue in mind. They constantly berate the KJV and archaic words, claiming we oppose updating language. This is false as a three dollar bill. We believe they know their charge is false, but they make it repeatedly because they cannot defend the false doctrine found in the volumes they promote.

(3) But we need to fortify ourselves, strengthen ourselves, for the future and learn and respect God's guidelines from Scripture. As congregations properly undertake work which is authorized in the Bible to be done, disputes should be kept at a minimum lest the work be retarded. Certainly there ought not be disruptions because of the insistence of human traditions.

Jesus knew the law and lived under it perfectly. He would not bow before the pressures of human traditionalism, nor should we. We must learn to distinguish between human traditions and truth, learn the truth, hold fast to the truth, promote the truth, and not allow the truth to be tied by human traditions. We should not allow the good that we can do to be shoved aside because of the failings of others to discern the distinction between truth and human traditionalism. We must teach them the distinction and press forward in the work of the Lord.

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from page 24

Noah's flood may have been just a local flood and doctrines that give accomodation to evolution?

I, like so many others, have been fooled by people many times. But one of the sources of my conflicts and problems among brethren has been my perception of a digressive drift in various preachers and churches that others did not see, or would not see, until it had become so obvious that only the dishonest could doubt it.

We have no yearning to be proven right or others proven wrong. But, if it were not so serious, it would be humorous how some folks act so surprised at times at what is happening in the

continued on page 5

# **Who Is Jesus?**

Living such a busy life as many people do, it is possible to overlook some of the more important matters as they are crowded out by lesser ones. We tend to take many things for granted when we would do well to keep certain basic and fundamental truths constantly before us. This lesson is designed to do just that, not by bringing anything new or that is unknown to Bible students, but, as Paul, Peter, Jude and others, bring to our remembrance things already understood. We shall identify Jesus.

To identify someone we tell who he is, something of his ancestry, his birthplace, nationality, things he did, especially his outstanding achievements. For example, how would you identify George Washington or Abraham Lincoln? We all would tell of their presidency, their prominent accomplishments, backgrounds, and the things that distinguish them and set them apart from all others. This is what we shall do regarding Jesus of Nazareth.

## **King Of The Jews**

Jesus was a Jew. Though He existed from the beginning (John 1:1), He was born in the flesh in a small town named Bethlehem (Matthew 21). His mother was a virgin (Luke 1:26-31). This meant He was a fleshly descendant of Abraham and David, but no earthly father. Matthew 1:1, *"The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."* He was of the tribe of Judah. Hebrews 7:14, *"For it is evident that our Lord hath sprung out of Judah."*

He was designated to be King of the Jews. Luke 1:32,33, *"He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David, and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."* At His death, John 19:19,20, *"And Pilate wrote a title also, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin."* Earlier at His birth, Matthew 2:2, *"Where is he that is born king of the Jews?"* Pilate also asked

Him when He stood before him, John 18:37, "*Art thou king of the Jews?*" Jesus answered affirmatively.

His kingdom was not a physical and earthly kingdom such as the nations and empires of men, but a spiritual one. The misunderstanding of many then, and now, regarding the nature of His kingdom, has caused no little confusion. Jesus was and is King of spiritual Israel, God's chosen people, for by that nation the Messiah was to come and Christians, those in the Lord's church, are the children and people of God today. The kingdom is the church and those in the church are the citizens of His kingdom over which He rules as King of kings and Lord of lords.

### **Preacher And Teacher**

Jesus was also a preacher and teacher. Nicodemus realized this by addressing Him with the term, "*Rabbi.*" This means an exalted teacher (John 3:1,2). Matthew 7:28,29 records the reaction of His hearers after listening to the Sermon on the Mount. "*And it came to pass when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were astonished at his teaching for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.*" Luke 5:3, when He asked Simon to push his boat from the land, "*And he sat down and taught the multitudes out of the boat.*" He taught in the Jewish synagogues. Luke 4:15, "*And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all.*" Matthew 26:18, Christ was known among the people as "*the Teacher.*" (ASV). Following His temptation by the devil in the wilderness, Matthew 4:17, "*From that time began Jesus to preach, and to say, Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" Someone has coined the phrase, "God had but one Son, and He was a preacher."

### **Son Of God**

Jesus is identified as the Son of God. It was so announced at His birth (Luke 1:32,35). Mark 1:1, "*The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.*" Peter confessed Him to be the Son of God (Matthew 16:16). Romans 1:4 teaches that by His resurrection He was "*declared to be the Son of God.*" On two separate occasions the Father in heaven confessed Jesus to be His Son. These were at His baptism (Matthew 3:17) and again on the mount of transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). These are but a few of the multitude of

witnesses and the massive Biblical evidence that Jesus Christ is the Son of the true and living God of heaven. Once this basic and fundamental fact is accepted the religion of which He is author is readily accepted. This truth undergirds the validity of His faith. It is the very foundation upon which the faith of Christ stands or falls (First Corinthians 3:11).

## **Savior**

But we would be amiss to fail to identify Jesus as the Savior of mankind from sin. He is the Redeemer for those of us who have sold ourselves to Satan by sinning. Matthew 1:21, *"And 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."* The name "Jesus" means savior. First John 4:14, *"And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father hath sent the Son to be the Savior of the world."* Luke 2:10,11, in the announcement to the shepherds, *"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."*

When Jesus was teaching the woman at Jacob's well and told her that He was the One that was to come, she ran to the city to tell others, who quickly came where Jesus was, and saw, and heard for themselves. Their conclusion was, John 4:42, *"Now we believe, not because of thy speaking (the speaking of the woman, JWB), for we have heard for ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."* Titus 1:4 identifies Him as *"Christ Jesus our Savior."* Ephesians 5:23, *"For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ also is the head of the church, being himself the Savior of the body."* This means He is my Savior and yours, and for all who will come to Him.

## **Regarding The Church**

We have mentioned that He is the foundation of the church, but He is also the builder of it, the head of it. First Corinthians 3:11, *"For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."* Matthew 16:18, *"...upon this rock I will build my church."* The rock to which He referred was the truth that Peter had just confessed regarding Him as the Son of God. As already quoted from Ephesians 5:23, He is the head of the church.

The Lord's church has no earthly head, but only the one head who is Christ. When people ask, "Where is the headquarters of the church of Christ?" which is a sensible question, especially since many denominations have earthly headquarters, our response should be, "The headquarters is where the head is, which is in heaven."

Seeing these things concerning the relationship of Christ to the church, it should behoove everyone to inquire whether the church to which they belong is founded on Christ, built by Him, with Christ and only Christ as head, following His will. As head He possesses "*all authority*." His people are not to look to creeds, manuals, disciplines, conferences, conventions, catechisms, synods, theologians, clergymen, human traditions or whatever else men have chosen to follow. He has "*all authority*" and His will is revealed to mankind in the inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient Scriptures, the Bible (Second Timothy 3:16,17).

### **Mediator**

Not only is He our Savior, but He is also our mediator between us and God, the Father. Even as we pray we recognize that we approach God through Christ (John 14:6). It is shameful that some would propose to pray through Mary, or someone the Vatican has designed as a "saint." The Bible teaches there is one mediator. First Timothy 2:5, "*For there is one God, one mediator also between God and men, the man, Christ Jesus.*" Such is also the emphasis in the teaching concerning Jesus as our High Priest, the mediator of a better covenant (Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). Hebrews 7:25,28, "*Wherefore he is also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them... For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity: but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.*"

### **He Is Judge**

Jesus will be our Judge. Romans 2:16 teaches that God shall judge but by and through Christ Jesus. The same is taught by Paul on Mars Hill, recorded in Acts 17:31. Second Timothy 4:1, "*I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his*

kingdom..." Jesus, and His Word, is the standard by which all men shall be judged (John 12:48).

There are other ways to identify Jesus, such as, the Lamb of God, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the Prince of peace, the Word of God, the way, the truth, the life, the bread of life, the water of life, the Messiah, Immanuel, the Holy One. But time and space being limited what we have mentioned will presently suffice.

### **Divine Brother**

But one more identification is in order. Romans 8:16,17, *"The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."* Jesus can be looked upon as the elder brother in the family of God, the Lord's church, Christ's body, the saved of the earth, faithful Christians. This brings forcefully to our attention the warm and close relationship we have with Jesus Christ.

How does one come into this relationship? Jesus tells us. Matthew 12:50, *"For whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother."* Our relationship with Christ depends upon how we respond to Deity's will.

This demands that we believe in Christ as the Son of God, repent of our sins, confess our faith in Him, and be baptized by His authority for the remission of sins, into Christ, reaching His saving blood and being washed clean of sins, whereupon God adds us to His family, the saved, the church.

† † † † †

### **UNSURPRISING SURPRISES**

There are many things that are truly surprising in life. As for people, they are the most unpredictable folks on earth. We could even say that the evidence of the fickleness and changeableness in the ways and manners of some people is glaringly apparent down through the periods of human history. There seldom passes a day that something unexpected takes place.

There are those things which surprise some that really ought not surprise them at all. In fact, it is really surprising that they are surprised, caught off guard and seem so unprepared for the unexpected. Particularly is this true regarding the accumulations of false doctrines and digressive tendencies among some. When you keep abreast of what takes place, listen hard and look closely, when someone once considered sound and reliable goes off some deep end, you are not that surprised because it is evident they have been heading that way for some time.

I once knew a preacher who everyone considered sound, but in private writings and conversations he began to "just raise questions for discussion" that were offensive to truth, but before long he was defending the departures he was "simply questioning." What became apparent was they he had secretly and privately held some false views pertaining to worship that he was testing cautiously before going public with them. Once he became bold enough to really speak what he had long believed it was obvious he had gone astray. The particular issue in this case was the instrument in worship. When he left the church for the Christian church many were surprised. I was not.

Some have been surprised at some of the advocates of "unity in diversity." I have not been surprised. When a man will advocate modern versions that are stained with many fatal doctrinal errors, how far is it until he openly advocates other false doctrines? Again, why should we be surprised when prominent brethren embark on inter-denominational ties when they have openly and boastfully embarked already on positions that lead the church into the recreation business with gymnasiums and all the things connected with it? How far is it for one to go who contends divorce for reasons other than fornication are permissible just so long as one does not remarry before he comes out with something else just as unsound?

Just why some are amazed at the direction some of the schools have taken in the past decades is beyond explanation, except they have not been aware of some of the personnel of these schools, their own schooling, and false ideas held. When administrations will tolerate on their faculties men who teach the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, are you surprised that they endorse other errors? When schools continue to uphold those who teach Jesus' teaching on marriage, divorce and remarriage is merely a "covenant passage" for Christians, why are you surprised when other false views are forthcoming from the same schools? Is there really a very big jump from contending that

continued on page 18



## **Errors, Errors, Errors**

Anyone who has labored in producing publications know what I mean. They fully understand that of which I speak. Try as hard as we may, we have yet to see an issue of our paper leave through the mails where we have not included errors. These errors are not doctrinal in nature but typographical. How we can look, read and cover as with a fine-toothed comb looking for things we need to correct and still miss them is difficult to explain.



**JAMES W. BOYD**

So often we discover them just as we about to put the paper in the mail, or after so much other work, such as folding, gathering, stitching, trimming, etc. has already been done and it is simply infeasible to discard everything and start over.

Someone once said about his bulletin that he put some errors in it because some folks are always looking for faults and he did that to make them happy. Believe me, no error is included deliberately. But they are there and often in abundance.

We beg the indulgence of our readers. When you find an error, just pride yourself in knowing better, hope we know better, but erred.

\* \* \* \* \*

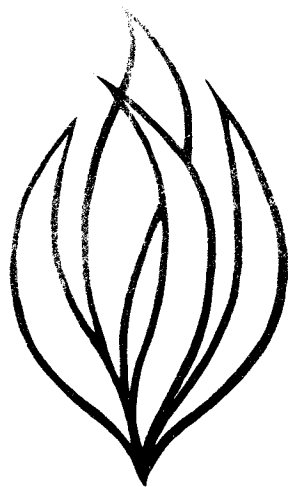
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# A Burning Fire



“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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# Concerning Marriage

Ignorance was never approved by the Savior, therefore, He came teaching to dispell darkness with the light of truth. We must concern ourselves with truth as Jesus taught recorded in the text of Mark 10:1-12.

*“And he arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts Judea by the further side of Jordan: and the people resort unto him again; and he, as he was wont, he taught them again. And the Pharisees came to him and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him. And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement and to put her away. And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife; and they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.”*

## Trap Questions

Jesus was constantly being asked questions, and as often as not, the questions were designed to trap Him in His words. The question asked Him on this occasion was a good question, but the motive was impure. People often ask questions today, not to learn or gain information, but for various sinister reasons. But let us study the question and the Lord's answer with a heart depleted of prejudice and try to learn what is the will of God in this matter of marriage.

To get a clearer picture of the question, consult Matthew 19:3. The answer Jesus gives whether one could divorce or not was obviously a negative one, and He showed it was not God's

will that such take place. While today divorces are granted for almost any reason, even for no reason, this is contrary to the will, intent and design of marriage as given by the Lord.

Jesus refers to the Mosaic Law under which His questioners lived. What the law taught was what they should obey. God's Word ought be allowed to be the final chapter on any subject. The Pharisees responded that Moses allowed divorce. Actually what Moses insisted was that there be a writing of divorcement if a divorce occur. Moses did not command divorce, but he "suffered" or allowed it, and Jesus said it was because the people were so hardened of heart that Moses did it. But it was not true that Moses allowed divorce for just any cause. The morality of the people was so low and rebellious that it was permitted, but never approved. There are things that God has permitted but not approved. This is one instance of that. God will even allow sin, but who would dare say that God approves of sin in any form?

Regardless of what Moses allowed, Jesus referred to God's original plan for marriage as the standard to follow. *"From the beginning it hath not been so."* God never intended that married people divorce. *"What God hath joined together let not man put asunder."* The will of God for marriage is that one leave father and mother and cleave to his or her mate until death separate them. How can there be any question in anyone's mind as to the permanency intended by God in the establishment of marriage? This idea that one is allowed to divorce just so long as they never remarry and God is not offended is as foreign to the truth on the subject as right is foreign to what is wrong.

### **Marriage Is More**

Marriage is more than just a social contract designed to propagate the earth and perpetuate the race. It is more than a civil contract entered according to the laws of the state, although these laws must be obeyed. It is not just a convenient economic arrangement. It is a sacred and divine contract, a relationship planned in heaven for mankind. It is ordained of God and should be entered, conducted and terminated only according to the will of Him who gave it. Herein is the fault of many who marry; namely, they fail to include God in their marriage. Marriage involves more than a man and a woman. It must include God who gave it.

The nature and purpose of marriage is for the happiness and welfare of mankind. It is not good for man to be alone. The marriage vow is a vow of perpetual and indissoluble friendship which no fortune or alteration of external circumstances should be allowed to interrupt or weaken. In marriage there is no longer just separate interests, but two become united as one. Often the cause of unhappiness in marriage is due to the dissimilarity of those involved in such as education, finances, religion, race, social status and other factors. These differences often place unbearable and unnecessary strains on the marriage bonds and they ought to be avoided before marriage occurs. Religious division is a burden far heavier than many marriages can bear. Nearly every religious advisor I have ever known or of whom I have heard plead with people to be sure the religion of the man and the woman is the same. Why does this have to be constantly brought to the attention of Christians who ought to recognize this from the start?

### **You And I Become We**

Marriage permits no separate possession but what was once I, my and mine, you and yours, becomes that which belongs to both of us. *"The two become one flesh."* The couple are together in all things. Deviations from this God-given intent invites stress, strain and tensions that ought not be given the right to exist. Such things are avoidable.

Marriage does not always bring perfect happiness to everyone. There are manifold reasons why this is true. Even so, this does not allow the dissolution of marriage. Only the death of one of those involved is the way that a marriage can honorably be terminated. If the record given in Mark was the only inspired information we had concerning this matter, we would have to conclude that death, and only death, ended a marriage in the sight of God. But Matthew 19:9 gives additional teaching that must be respected as we study the will of God in marriage.

### **One Cause**

God allows divorce for one reason and one reason only. That reason is the cause of fornication. It is not mandatory for marriage to be broken even then because there is the possibility of genuine repentance and forgiveness. But God does not demand that a person live as husband or wife with a mate that is

not faithful to their sexual vow to keep themselves only to their mate. The vow of marriage is violated by fornication. This teaching is so clear that there ought not be any dispute regarding it. Death is the only honorable way for marriage to end. Fornication will allow a divorce, but that means sin has entered the picture. How far removed from God's will our society has drifted! We are paying a terrible price for man's rebellion.

Have you ever considered the horror of divorce? We read of divorced people more and more, even in the church, and some try so hard to picture it as something beneficial and strain to remove the stigma attached to it. While the shame before mankind of the breakdown of a marriage has been reduced, unfortunately for the guilty and those who suffer divorce, there is no way to ever erase the tragic consequences of it. Divorce has been characterized as tearing a body limb from limb. It is like taking a human body and placing it upon the rack and gradually, painfully, disjuncting it until it rips asunder and leaves the victim destroyed. Just think how Jesus teaches in marriage two become one flesh, but in divorce this one flesh is torn apart.

In Jesus' day, like our own, marriage was not respected as it ought to have been. There was great laxity in meeting marital responsibilities. But the teaching of Jesus restores the standard of marriage as God fixed it from the creation of the world. It reaffirms the permanency of it and the sinfulness of tearing it apart. Woe to the one who is the cause for this tearing! If we love God, we will strive to make our marriage what God intended it to be when He gave it in Eden.

### **Evil Results**

If the institution of marriage, and its sacredness, is not respected in a society, we learn from history the inevitable collapse of that society. National greatness cannot continue when the home, the basic unit of society, goes awry. Without respect for God's marriage law, the level of morality of the people of the land plummets downward until the degeneracy of the race is overwhelming. Souls are cast into misery, homes fall, despair and hopelessness reign over the hearts and lives of people, children are neglected and the security, training and righteous upbringing are absent. The attendant evils resulting from all of this are apparent to one and all who will honestly consider the havoc and ruin caused by the ever increasing breakdown of the home and the disregard of marriage vows.

The future success of the nation depends upon a nation where righteousness prevails. With the divorce rate climbing year by year, and the population being flooded with those who have shown little to no respect for God's moral teaching and the divine edicts regarding marriage, the very foundation of civilization is threatened and nothing is left to sustain.

### **One Faith**

Homes where there is religious division are very subject to this kind of dissolution. This is not to say that divorce does not occur even in homes where the partners were united religiously. But somewhere along the line one or both abandon the authority of God whenever there is divorce. Religiously divided homes have not the ultimate common ground. They have no final standard by which to measure all matters. There is no common respect for the divine teaching of God. In the very area where people need the support and encouragement of each other the most, it is lacking. The children reared in such divided homes become confused, intimidated, frustrated, not knowing what to believe, and often they strike out into areas where their own destruction, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually, is the ultimate result. No home, regardless of how much happiness may exist therein, is as God wants it to be until all who are accountable to God in that home belong to God through Christ. The greatest contribution anyone can make toward the stability of the home and marriage is to be a faithful Christian. When that is the situation the blessings of God will be in evidence and the home will be what God wants for it.



### **Godly Sorrow**

*"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death."*  
(Second Corinthians 7:10).

Those who love the Lord ought not find it difficult to be sorry for offending Him. We are not to be simply sorry we got caught in some evil, but sorry because we have done injury toward God. This kind of sorrow will lead a person to repent of his sins and his repentance will lead him to a reformed life.

# **The Sinful Woman**

John 7:53-8:11, “And every man went unto his own house. Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned; but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.”

This was an event in the life of Christ when a serious problem was placed before Him. First Peter 1:21 teaches that Christ is our example and we are to follow in His steps. We see some of His steps in this record.

## **The Accusation**

The accusation against the woman was adultery. Even though often glamorized and glorified in our society, certainly not considered very bad by many, and many writings sensationalize and even advise it, commonplace in movies, magazines, television and other places, the Biblical teaching against adultery still stands. The social stigma of being guilty of adultery has been dulled but the sinfulness of it has not changed. There is no way to glamorize it into something right before God and God's people. Those who do such things are headed straight for hell unless they are forgiven (Galatians 5:19ff; Revelation 21:8).

There was no question as to her guilt, considering she was taken in the very act. She violated God's law. An appeal to the Scriptures was made to show the law demanded her punishment because she sinned against God and marital purity. The accusers seemed to have a ironclad and fool-proof case against her. There was not defense offered and the accusation was not denied.

### **The Accusers**

Most of us probably center our attention at this point on the accused woman. But we should take note of the accusers as well. They were the scribes and Pharisees, the lawyers who knew the law, copied the law, and were among those who were the strictest in enforcing the law. Christ was not dealing with lightweights as opponents, but with the skilled and scholarly.

Were they wrong to bring the woman to Jesus? They were not wrong to condemn adultery, but Jesus was not the one to judge in this matter. That was for the Jewish authorities. They were wrong for tempting Christ and they were wrong for being self-righteous. The very words, "scribes and Pharisees" ring with hypocrisy. "*Woe unto you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites,*" Jesus said repeatedly in Matthew 23. Their religion was form and lip-service, topped with ritual.

There are many warnings in Scripture against self-righteousness. First Corinthians 10:12, "*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*" Second Corinthians 10:17,18, "*But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.*" Galatians 6:3, "*For if a man thinketh himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.*" Romans 12:3, "*For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not yo think of himself more highly than he ought to think.*" The instruction regarding the "*mote*" and the "*beam*" of Matthew 7:1-5 is applicable to the sin of self-righteousness.

Let me take a swipe also at the ridiculous idea now much in vogue that if you sin openly and are honest in admitting it that somehow this is more honorable than trying to hide it. Sin is dishonorable in every case. Those of yesteryear may have sinned and hypocritically tried to hide it, but at least they had enough sensitivity about sin to know it ought to be hidden and not paraded openly in a boastful fashion as if openness meant

goodness. People talk about certain sinful deeds coming out of the closet. Some things, if they do exist, ought always be kept in a closet. Opening them up before all as if this somehow makes them less vicious is a delusion of the sinful mind.

### **The Motive**

What was the object of accusing this woman? Why did they bring her to Jesus? They had no desire that the law of God and Moses be kept. They refused to carry out the law once confronted. They just slipped away. The law demanded both parties be punished alike but only one party was seized. Did they have a double-standard as many still erroneously do today regarding immoralities?

As noted, Jesus was not the one appointed to declare her guilty or innocent nor was He to expedite the punishment. The truth is these accusers had not a desire for justice nor respect for the law. The sin did not really bother them that much. They were trying to get Jesus, not the woman. They wanted Him to either condemn or condone her behavior. If He condemned they could have accused Him of usurping the authority of the Jewish court. To condone would mean an accusation of approving of adultery. Jesus must have felt as many preachers have felt many times, "You are going to be wronged either way you go."

But Jesus led a perfect life and they could not find fault with Him unless they invented situations wherein they could find fault. Jesus at first seemed to ignore them and wrote on the ground. What He wrote we do not know. But He knew their evil hearts and sinister motives. While He strongly disapproved the sin of adultery and had so taught, even teaching against lust, He also condemned self-righteousness. He dealt with both sins.

### **His Response**

With their persistent inquiry, He responded in a way that convicted the accusers of their sins, exposing their self-righteousness, and laying bare their evil hearts, and at the same time dealt with the woman who sinned with compassion and forgiveness. He did not condone either sin, but as for the woman, He forgave the sinner. In one brief comment He shifted the responsibility and burden of condemnation from Himself to the accusers. Jesus returned to writing on the ground and one

by one the exposed accusers slipped away, stunned, embarrassed, caught in one of their own traps. Their attempt to ensnare Jesus backfired. They were the ones who were also shown to be sinful and they were made aware of it.

The attitude of Jesus toward one who sins is clearly seen. Our Lord wants none to be lost and wants all to be forgiven. He pleads with everyone to meet conditions of salvation today that are revealed in His will so all can be forgiven and united with God. We should be as anxious to forgive others and studiously want to forgive others as Jesus. We also need forgiveness. Recovering brethren who sin is a glorious accomplishment (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19,20).

### **The Results**

After the scribes and Pharisees left, Jesus told the woman she was forgiven. She was not told to be baptized because baptism for the remission of sins in His name had not yet been preached. That was first announced on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38). As He had the power to forgive even while here on earth before His will went into effect, He will still forgive but now according to His will which commands baptism. She was admonished to “sin no more.”

This was a great victory for Christ. While condemning sin, He saved the sinner. He was not defending the woman “in sin,” but saving the woman “from sin.” He did this by forgiving her of sin and teaching her to abstain from sin. He was fulfilling His mission to earth; namely, to bring salvation to the lost.

Had He left any appearance of condoning or ignoring her sin He would have contradicted His own teaching in Matthew 19:1-9, as well as the Sermon on the Mount. The way He handled this situation imposed upon Him only provokes us to glorify Him all the more.

We “*all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*” (Romans 3:23). We, too, need forgiveness. Christ will forgive, if we will respond to His call of the gospel to believe, repent, confess our faith in Him, and be baptized “*for the remission of sins*” in the name of, or by the authority of Christ.

† † † † †

# ***Why We Worship On The First Day Of The Week***

Often the question is asked, "Where does the New Testament command us not to keep the Sabbath Day?" A similar question is, "Where are we commanded to worship in the first day of the week rather than the Sabbath?" The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week, or our Saturday. In the Old Testament we learn that God's people observed that day for religious reasons. Even though there are around 500 million people who profess to be Christians, and this is not using the term "Christian" as the New Testament defines it, there are but a few hundred thousand who profess to be followers of Christ who contend we are to worship on the seventh day rather than the first day of the week. It is fair to say that the majority of religious people really do not think it makes much difference one way or the other because they have the idea that whatever a person wants to do, and does with sincerity, that God will accept it anyway.

The immediate answer to the question is, "There is no place in the New Testament where we are specifically commanded not to worship on the Sabbath Day." In fact, there is no commandment anywhere that forbids us from worshipping God any day of the week. But neither are we commanded to observe the seventh day above other days.

## **Matter Of Authority**

The real question should be, "Where is the authority for worshipping on the first day of the week rather than keeping the Sabbath as was done in Old Testament times?" What we do should be done by the authority of Christ (Colossians 3:17), and without that authority we are acting on the authority of men rather than God.

Sabbath keepers offer certain contentions that are designed to persuade us to keep the Sabbath. We feel obligated to consider such things before we dismiss them. Let us see if their contentions have Biblical and historical merit.

We are told that Sunday, the first day of the week, is a day of ancient pagan worship of the sun and this is where the day got its name, Sunday. They conclude, therefore, the day is unfit for

Christian worship and is the result of the mixing of paganism and Christianity.

But Saturday is no better in this regard, taking its name from the worship of the planet Saturn. The point is, neither of the names have any religious significance to Christianity any more than a man's name like Brown, Black, Green or White determines his skin color. All of the days of the week take their names from mythological sources and worship of various man-made gods.

### **Not Constantine...**

It is claimed that Constantine, Roman emperor, by imperial edict changed the day of worship from Saturday to Sunday about the year 321 A.D. This is historically inaccurate. It is true that he gave the day an official Roman sanction and declared it a holiday, but the day of worship on the first day of the week had been practiced long before his decree. In fact, giving it legal recognition was one thing, but there is no evidence that Christians worshipped in observance of the Sabbath prior to his imperial edict.

### **Nor Rome...**

Others claim the Roman Catholic Church changed the day from the seventh to the first. It is true that Catholics changed many things that varied from the New Testament. They like to lay claim for many of these changes. But they even deny having changed the day of worship. They take no credit for it whatever and this is significant since they like to claim authority for almost everything. Catholicism was historically unknown for nearly 600 years after the Lord's church was established in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after the Lord's resurrection.

### **Nor Moses...**

It is contended that the seventh day observance is in the Mosaic Law. This is true. Sabbatarians will admit this law has been removed, but only in part. They arbitrarily divide Moses' law into moral and ceremonial parts, claiming only the latter has been removed and that Sabbath keeping falls under the moral law category. We must look at this closely.

Of the more than 660 laws of the Mosaic Law, there is no

verse that makes a division as moral and ceremonial, one part removed and the other remaining. This is simply man's imagination and invention.

To remember the Sabbath Day is the fourth of the Ten Commandments and no passage designates them as being wholly moral. In fact, the fourth commandment is obviously ceremonial in nature. Even if the moral laws of Moses were retained, the Sabbath would be excluded. The Sabbath had to do with ceremony keeping, not morality.

### **Not The Old Law...**

Furthermore, all of the law of Moses has been taken away, including the Ten Commandments. Romans 7:1, "*Know ye not, brethren, [for I speak to them that know the law,] how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as his liveth?*" Then Paul said, verse 6, "*But now are we delivered from the law...*" From what law did Paul say we are delivered? Paul identifies it as the law that said, "*Thou shalt not covet,*" which is the tenth of the Ten Commandments, a moral law. While it is true that nine of the Ten Commandments have been embodied into the law of Christ, and some of these expanded to include not only actions but attitudes, the new will of Jesus did not include the fourth that calls for the remembrance of the Sabbath.

The truth is that the Sabbath law is a part of that law from which we are delivered. To hold to that law is to deny the faith and authority of Christ to be above that of Moses. Galatians 3:23-25, "*But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.*" Few things are taught clearer in the New Testament than the fact that the law God gave Israel through Moses is binding upon no person today, Jew or Gentile.

But again, Colossians 2:14, "*Christ, having blotted out the bond written in ordinances that was against us... nailing it to his cross.*" Then Colossians 2:16,17 says of those things of the old law, "*Let not man judge you*" according to such things. They are not to be followed inasmuch as they were shadows of things to come. Notice, among those things that were not to be used as a standard for judgment included sabbath days.

In Galatians 4 and the allegory of Sarah and Hagar as they

represented the new and old laws, it is evident that the old law has been taken away. To attempt to be justified by the old law is to fall from grace (Galatians 5:4).

### **Nor The First Week...**

Much is made of Genesis 2:2,3, so let us read these words. *"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made, and God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made."* The contention is that God, from the beginning, required the observance of the Sabbath and that He hallowed it at the end of creation.

There is no question that God "sanctified" the Sabbath. But "when" He did it is something else. For whom did He hallow it? For how long did He hallow it? When did man begin to observe it? For these questions to be answered we turn to Scripture.

Nehemiah 9:13,14, *"Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai, and spakest with them from heaven, and gavest them right judgments, and true law, good statutes, and commandments: and madest known unto them thy holy sabbath, and commandest them precepts, statutes, and laws, by the hand of Moses thy servant."* There is not one line of evidence that the patriarchs prior to Moses observed the Sabbath, and they were people of God. The law was given at Sinai and to the Israelite nation (Deuteronomy 5:2,3). It was never a law given to Gentiles nor a law given before Sinai.

As for its duration, it was to last throughout the generation of the Jews (Exodus 31:16ff). That has long since past and the law is not even binding on that race and nation to which it was given. It certainly does not apply to us today.

### **Nor His Ministry...**

Some contend we should observe the Sabbath because Jesus did. But keep in mind that Jesus was a Jew and lived under the law and lived perfectly under the law. It was still in effect for the Jew during His lifetime on earth. But the question is, "Did He enjoin the observance of the Sabbath on those who would come to God through Him? If so, where is the passage?"

Every argument put forth by Sabbath keepers fails to prove

the Sabbath is still God's law for all the world today. But to show their contentions wrong does not prove the first day of the week to be the correct day of worship. We now turn attention to this matter. Whereas Christ did not bind the Sabbath on Christians, where is the Scripture that shows the Christians worshipped on the first day of the week which is our Sunday?

### **But The New Covenant**

The first day of the week was a significant day in Christianity because so many important things happened on that day. Christ arose on the first day (John 1). The Holy Spirit came on the apostles on the first day, Pentecost (Acts 2). The church was established that same day (Acts 2). Christ appeared to His disciples on the first day (John 20:19). In the absence of emphasis on the seventh day, we find examples of assembly for worship, study, giving and the Lord's Supper on the first day (Acts 20:7; First Corinthians 16:1,2). The command to not forsake the assembly in Hebrews 10:25 must be noted. We are commanded to assemble, not forsake it, and in these assemblies we worship God through Christ.

"But did not Paul go to the synagogue on the Sabbath?" He did, but not for the purpose of Jewish worship, but to take advantage of the opportunity of teaching concerning Christ. When he spoke to his Christian brethren it was on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).

### **History's Testimony**

Secular history, which is not our religious authority, is a corroborating evidence of the day the early Christians assembled for worship. Every Christian literature, letters, commentaries, histories of the church, as well as non-Christian accounts indicate the same thing. Christians met for worship on the first day of the week, the same day Justin Martyr called "the Lord's Day," taken from the phrase in Revelation 1:10. These secular writings date back within forty to fifty years of the life of John the apostle of Christ.

If we be honest with the evidence, we can draw some conclusions with certainty and assurance. The Sabbath was enjoined on Israel during the period when Moses' law was operative for that nation. But once the law of Christ was revealed and set in effect, that entire law was removed. We live

by and under the authority of Christ and His authority says nothing of the observance of the Sabbath, but shows His disciples worshipping on the first day of the week. This is why we do the same thing. We “*speak as the oracles of God.*” (First Peter 4:11). By command, example and historical evidence, we can make such a conclusion.

Rather than our practice being questionable, we would ask those who contend for the continuation of Sabbath keeping where is the passage that the patriarchs observed that day? Where is the teaching that any except Israel was so commanded? Where is the division of Moses’ law into ceremonial and moral division with some being set aside and others retained? Why take some of the moral law of Moses but omit part of it, like taking one’s brother’s widow and raising seed in his name? Why do they not restrict their labor and travel with attending punishments for violators as the Mosaic Law requires. These questions must be considered in the light of truth and will assist to show that worshipping on the first day of the week is not really the major question, but observing the Sabbath is questioned. The will of Christ makes it plain what we must do, and this is why we worship on the first day of the week.

† † † † †

(continuation from page 24)

Let us learn these four lessons from this chapter. (1) The tragic and dire consequences of sin and disobedience. (2) The need to train each generation to follow the truth. (3) Regardless of the cause of sin or who is to blame, we cannot escape reaping what we sow. Someone has said, “Those who eat must pay the cook; Those who ride must provide the fare; So it is with us, my friend; Those who sin the grief must bear.” (4) Let us pursue the mercy and grace of God that we might be forgiven of sin that will destroy us. We do this by obeying the gospel. This means to believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, to repent of sins, to confess our faith in Christ, and to be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, to be raised to walk in newness of life and living faithfully as a Christian until such time when the life for us on earth comes to an end.

† † † † †

# ***Why The Early Church Grew***

As you read the book of Acts, you soon come to Acts 6:7 which states, *"And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly: and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith."* What a wonderful statement of success and progress! Does this not reflect the hopes and desires of Christians now for the church? This is what we want for the faithful church of Christ anywhere and everywhere it exists.

What made such a growth possible? As we think on this we are struck with the thought that the present is due to a great extent to what has happened in the past. What made the success and progress of the early church so evident was the result of what had been done previously.

The history of the church at this time was very short. But whatever had taken place is what we need to make happen again, at least in principle, so the church today will grow as God would have it grow.

Looking into the earlier chapters of Acts we are impressed with the thorough preparation that had been made for the coming of the church before it was established. Even before the foundation of the world God had designed His plan for saving man, which involves the church because the church is composed of the saved. But especially in the years immediately prior to the establishment of the church there had been concerted efforts made to get things ready. The ministry of John the Baptist had been to prepare a people for the coming of the Lord, converting people to a righteous way of living, repenting of their sins and being baptized for the remission of sin.

The personal ministry of Christ and His apostles had been to preach, *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel."* (Mark 1:15). The hearts and minds of people were cultivated to be receptive to the great scheme of salvation and the successful establishment of the Lord's church in Jerusalem.

## **Plan And Prepare**

In most every noble undertaking there must first be adequate planning and preparation. Often that is the most important part

of the task. So many good things have fallen in defeat because people go off “half-cocked” and ill-prepared. But even with good plans, that is no assurance of success. It might sound strange at first, but it is true that plans do not work. People must work. Good plans are needful, but that alone will accomplish little to nothing.

### **Planting**

There was a grand planting of the truth on Pentecost. The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ was proclaimed, as well as His ascension into glory. The apostles had been told by Jesus to wait in Jerusalem for power from on high, which was the Holy Spirit. On that Jewish feast day of Pentecost, as revealed in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit came on the apostles and they began preaching remission of sins in the name of Jesus Christ. With manifold proofs and evidences of the truthfulness of their message that Jesus is both Lord and Christ, the performance of miracles to confirm their words, the Scripture tells us that three thousand obeyed the gospel that first day and were added to the church. For the first time we read of people being in the church. The enthusiasm, rejoicing and gladness ran high among the redeemed. The new faith of Jesus Christ was now a reality. Christianity had taken its place in this sin-sick world. Many were converted at the beginning. In but a few days thousands were added. But the point we make and stress is that nobody would have been saved if there had not been the preaching of the truth, the planting of truth in hearts. The Lord’s church cannot and will not grow without truth. This is the “*seed of the kingdom*” (Luke 8:11). We may bring in crowds and influence many people, but the church is dependent on the grand planting of truth in order for it to grow.

### **Stedfastness**

Beginning with vigor is essential, but continuing the work with vigor and stedfastness is also essential. Those who were baptized had to be taught more and more, as the Great Commission of Jesus in Matthew 28:18-20 teaches. The early Christians grew because they busied themselves in becoming spiritually strong. The apostles continued preaching forthrightly and powerfully. They condemned evil; called for repentance and baptism. They were constantly on the job, daily, proclaiming the truth without

compromise. Truth was precious to them.

They did not just teach the “first principles” of entrance into the kingdom, but also what is expected of the citizens in the kingdom. No church will amount to much real value unless this constant preaching to sinner and saint is aggressively pursued. A vigorous teaching effort must exist because the faith of Christ must be taught (John 6:44,45). *“And daily in the temple and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.”* (Acts 5:42).

### **Persecution**

Even that which was intended to be harmful to the church was turned into an advantage and opportunity for the church to grow. Then, as now, the Lord’s church has enemies. Christians suffer persecution which is intended to discourage brethren to give up the faith and quit. But because the early church considered persecution in a way the enemies of truth did not expect, even persecution was helpful.

Persecution and criticism can be very destructive, but only if we let it be. It depends on the way we react to it and what our attitude toward it really is. Some are never persecuted and the reason may be because they are so lax in serving God that they are not giving the devil much concern. But when Peter and John were imprisoned and commanded not to preach and teach anymore, they took it as a challenge rather than a hindrance. They gave thanks to God they were considered worthy to suffer for the cause of Jesus Christ.

When you do what is right, there will be those who will want to hinder you any way they can. But hardship can be used to gain strength. *“Knowing this that the trying of your faith worketh patience.”* (James 1:3). Instead of allowing opposition to cause them to draw back and give up, it motivated them to be stronger and more determined than ever before, and the church grew.

### **Liberality**

Another characteristic of the early church that helped it grow was the individual liberality in giving. Unselfishness abounded throughout their midst. This was a manifestation of their love for God and one another. They had all things common, which meant if any lacked the others provided. This was not a communistic, compelled, forced pooling of resources, but a

voluntary, brotherly assistance to whoever needed anything. They, like the Good Samaritan, had the attitude, "What is mine is yours if you need it." What a wonderful fellowship!

Some even sold their possessions and gave the proceeds into the direction and care of the apostles (Acts 4:34,35). This they did willingly.

Why were they so liberal in this matter? The answer is the same reason people are liberal in giving today. They loved the church, the truth, the Lord, one another, and the lost. They had compassion toward those less fortunate than were they. There was a brotherly unity and mutual consideration for each other. They had dispelled covetousness, greed, envy and selfishness. By their giving they had the privilege and opportunity to let their love produce fruit.

God loves a cheerful giver (Second Corinthians 9:7). Those that sow sparingly will reap sparingly. But those that sow bountifully can expect to reap bountifully (Second Corinthians 9:6). This is a good lesson for us now. But what are we going to do with it?

### **Words And Deeds**

The early church grew because they coupled their words with their deeds. Some have a good "talk" religion but are short on a "walk" religion. *"Even so let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* (Matthew 5:16). People learn by seeing good done as well as hearing about it. Preaching good works but never performing good works will retard growth.

*"Pure religion and undefiled before God the Father is this; To visit the fatherless and widows and to keep himself unspotted from the world."* (James 1:27). These early Christians lived apart from the sinful ways of the world. John wrote, *"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."* (First John 2:15). What a needed lesson for our time!

As they had opportunity they did good to all, especially their brethren (Galatians 6:10). Acts 6 teaches how they took care of needy widows among themselves.

When those outside of Christ see Christians practicing what they preach it will provoke some to want to be Christians also. Possibly this is one reason growth is retarded. Many Christians only "talk" about being a Christian, and if they were arrested for

being a Christian it is possible that there would not be enough evidence to convict them.

## **Purity**

Finally, the preceding chapters before the statement of great growth showed how the early church did not ignore sin in its ranks. It is not God's will to allow sin to remain among members of the church and allow it to go unrebuked and undisciplined. Many members of the church today simply do not believe this truth. They think sin in the church is quite acceptable. Even though brethren of our time are often reluctant to obey God, we wonder why they think God did not know what He was talking about when He taught discipline, even to the point of withdrawing fellowship from those intent on walking disorderly and not according to apostolic tradition and teaching.

Annanias and Saphirra lied about what they were giving and God struck them dead. Does not this show God's will regarding sin in the church? Once a preacher cited that event and commented that he was glad God did not treat people that way now or he probably would not have many to hear him preach. One older and wiser brother remarked that the hearers would probably not have a preacher, either.

One of the hindrances to growth in our time is the failure to insist on one another being what God's book demands us to be. There are brethren in various stages of growth and process of maturing and they must be taught and encouraged. But there are brethren who are rebellious and disobedient to God's truth, and when that is tolerated without dealing with it God's way how do we expect those who are lost to be favorably impressed that we even believe what we say to ourselves? Those who drag their feet regarding the exercise of discipline as God teaches it do the church a disservice and bring reproach on the cause of Christ because they are willing to show the church is not going to be and not going to do what God requires. Regardless of the excuses offered, what excuse can men offer that is legitimate for disobeying God, even in this matter?

## **Discipline**

Some complain that discipline will harm the church. God did not think so. After the severe disciplinary measure God took against that evil couple in Acts 5 the church grew as never

before. *“And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.”* (Acts 5:14). The failure to let people know that the members of the church intend to follow truth destroys the appeal to become members of it.

Why did the early church grow? There was a thorough preparation and planning, a vigorous beginning, a constant and strong preaching and teaching effort, facing and overcoming persecution, liberality and unselfishness, words coupled with deeds and the maintenance of the high standard of purity. None of this gimmickry and trickery, entertainments, booster programs and such like were in evidence. When are we going to learn what God shows us does the job?

Times change, but truth does not. These principles, properly applied in our time and circumstance, will cause the church to grow. Whatever may be lacking where we attend, we ought begin now to develop and carry forward these very characteristics. It will save souls and that, after all, is the business of the Lord's church. Would that we all would even learn that.

† † † † †

## ***Lessons From Judges***

Joshua had led the Israelites across the Jordan River into Canaan and they began settling the land as it was conquered. Judges, chapter two, gives us an insight into the Israelite people's thinking and their relationship with God in the last days of Joshua and the years immediately following. A review of this chapter presents us some practical principles that were applied then and are just as useful for us today.

The account goes like this (and you are encouraged to read the entire chapter). The nation, even though it controlled almost all of the land, had not been obedient to one of the Lord's commandments to completely drive out the enemy and the heathen nations that had occupied the land previously. Neither were they to make treaties and leagues with those people. The reason this was prohibited was very simple. God did not want His people to become attached to those who did not serve Him because He knew that such association could only result in temptation for Israel to be led astray from Him to their own

spiritual and physical destruction.

The result of their disobedience in this matter was that those nations remained among them and proved to be as a thorn in their side throughout Israel's entire occupation of the land of Canaan. Israel could not disobey God and expect to escape the consequences of their disobedience.

### **After Joshua**

During the days of Joshua and the elders of the people who served with him, Israel remained, for the most part, loyal and faithful to God. This teaches us the inestimable value of truly righteous leadership for any nation. But then as the older and faithful men were dying, a new generation was rising who did not appreciate what Joshua had done and that for which Joshua had stood during his life. They did evil in the sight of the Lord, forsook God, "doing their own thing and going their own way." They sought out the heathen gods of the people they failed to destroy, serving Baal, Ashteroth, and other gods rather than Jehovah of heaven; the very thing that God wanted them to avoid. But they did not heed His warning.

The anger of Jehovah was kindled against them and they were delivered into the hands of their enemies. Their enemies made slaves of them and the nation was greatly distressed, unable to enjoy the fruits of their own labors. But once in this deplorable state, the people would realize what they had done and would repent of their evil deeds and raise their voices to God in petitions for deliverance from their foes. God, hearing their cry, would raise up a judge who would become the leader of the people and who would lead in a revolt against their enemies and bring them their freedom once again. When they faithfully followed the leadership of the judge they would experience their recovery and be blessed. But time after time they would cease their service to God and return to the ways of evil. When they did, they would suffer the same punishments as had been suffered previously. Israel proved so unstable so many times that God determined to leave their enemies in the land rather than drive them out altogether in order to use them as a means of chastisement of Israel when they digressed from Him.

This fairly and briefly paraphrases the information of Judges 2. But there are several lessons we can learn from all of this in addition to the historical value of the chapter.

## **Obedience**

First, we might consider the original cause of the troubles that Israel suffered down through the years. In a word, their problem was disobedience. The people disobeyed the commandments of the Lord that allowed the heathen inhabitants to remain among them. Disobedience always brings sorrow and regret to the disobedience. *"Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."* (Proverbs 14:34). The book of Judges is a history of a nation that proves this truth.

People often suffer greatly in this life because of their sins. Violation of God's will brings disgrace and hardship on any people. Immorality, riotous living, licentiousness will produce heartbreak, disease, and shame.

In addition to the suffering in this life, there is much more dreadful punishment awaiting the disobedience unless they are forgiven of their sins. Sin and disobedience was at the heart of Israel's distresses.

## **Leadership**

Second, we observe the disastrous results when there is failure to maintain a good leadership for each generation. During Joshua's life and that of those who served with him, the people were led properly as they cooperated with their godly leaders. But when a new generation came upon the scene, Israel went astray. They did not go astray simply because a new generation took over, but because the new generation did not have respect for the things of the past and the necessity to be loyal to God. It was not because they were not teachable, but because they were rebellious and unwilling to submit to God.

Some are always speaking against the youth. But they must realize the awesome responsibility of the older generation to properly train the next one if matters are to be as they should be. It just takes one untaught generation to introduce a wholesale digression from God. The young will not likely rise higher than the levels they are taught by the older folks. The young should be taught to be right with God, and we should expect them to follow God. They usually become just about what we expect of them. For this reason we must always hold aloft the high, noble, pure, righteous and admirable standards of the Lord before our oncoming youth.

As we see the disaster of a younger generation assuming

control, a generation that was evil, let us not forget the failure of the older generation to teach, instruct, guide, mold and train the young. Each generation must fight its own battles. But the generation that has received good training is already ahead. This is why the home and the church must not fail in its duty to see that the young are indoctrinated in truth, well grounded and established in *"thus saith the Lord."* Otherwise, the cause of Christ is severely crippled.

### **Wages Of Sin**

Third, regardless of the cause of sin or where we wish to place the blame for Israel's failures, God does not forever tolerate rebellion. There comes a time of retribution and recompense. Even if many things seem to go right in this world, all sin is not paid for in this life.

God is longsuffering and merciful, but we cannot take unfair advantage of this benevolence of God and expect to defy Him without Him taking notice of it. *"Be sure your sins will find you out,"* is a principle of truth that not people can dismiss.

Nor does it do much good to say, *"My ancestors brought my trouble upon me."* Regardless of what our ancestors did or did not do, we do not have to follow evil. We have a personal responsibility also. There comes the time in the life of every person of accountability when he must consider his own duty to God and he cannot shift the blame for his sins to another.

### **Mercy Of God**

Fourth, even in this chapter which is not a pretty one regarding Israel, we see the operation of the mercy and love of God. When an evildoer is penitent, God tries to help him. Israel would sin, but when they would repent, God was forgiving. He was not deaf to their pleas and petitions of those whose heart was turned again His direction.

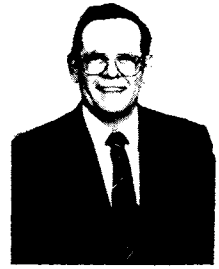
God could have reacted by saying, *"You have brought your disgrace upon yourself. Now wrestle with it the best you can."* Indeed, they were not worthy of God's goodness toward them any more than we are worthy of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ that we might be forgiven of our sins. But we learn that if we will turn to God and seek His way He will look upon us with mercy and forgiveness. How dreadful life would be without this benefit!

(continued on page 15)



## ***Do It For My Sake***

Paul wrote to his friend Philemon, *"If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself."* Onesimus was a slave that had fled from Philemon. As providence worked, this slave came in contact with Paul and was converted to Christ. This meant that Paul, Philemon and Onesimus were now brothers in the Lord. Paul knew that the right thing for Onesimus was to return to Philemon. He also knew that the right thing for Philemon to do was to receive Onesimus, not as a runaway slave, but as a brother in Christ. Their spiritual relationship should make a difference in the way they looked upon one another.



**JAMES W. BOYD**

To encourage Philemon to have the proper attitude and exhibit the proper conduct toward Onesimus, Paul sent Philemon this short epistle and urged Philemon to look upon his slave as he would look upon Paul. Even though their social status was different, they were partners in the cause of Christ.

Being Christians makes a tremendous difference in the way we consider people when we are both in the Lord and partners in Christ.

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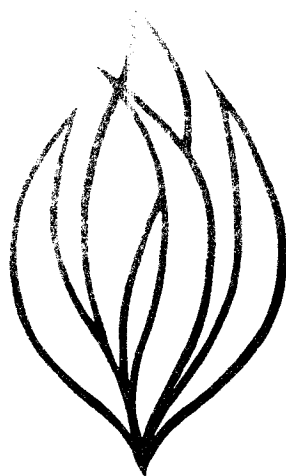
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# A Burning Fire



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



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# **Questions Regarding Marriage, Divorce, And Remarriage**

This is a controversial subject, but let us understand something about controversial subjects. It does not mean there is no right and wrong regarding them. It does not mean we cannot know what the truth is. It simply means there is controversy over it, usually because there are those who do not want, will not accept, and refuse to admit the truth.

We shall approach the subject by asking questions and allowing the Word of God to provide the answers. When some of us were growing up, gospel preachers frequently had lessons on this theme. Possibly the lack of sermons teaching God's truth on the subject is one big reason why many marriages have suffered divorce, and many have remarried when they had no right to do so.

## **When, Where, By Whom?**

Where did marriage originate? A reading of Genesis 2:18-25 makes it unmistakable that God is the author of marriage. Marriage is not merely a social arrangement, an economic situation, a legal contract, but a divine institution. It is the oldest of three institutions ordained of God; the three being the home, civil government, and the church. Any and all disposition of marriage must include God. It is not a matter merely between a man and a woman, a husband and a wife. God is involved. The failure to accept this truth is the reason there is so much error being taught and practiced regarding marriage today.

## **Why?**

What are the purposes of marriage? If we were to choose one word above all others to convey the intent of marriage we must choose the word "*companionship*." The woman is a help meet, or suitable, to man. Marriage partners are to leave all others and cleave to each other. Genesis 2:18 teaches the basic purpose of

marriage is companionship.

Procreation, the perpetuation of the human race, is another purpose of marriage (Genesis 1:28). Children are to be born of parents who are married to each other. The home is the basic unit of society. The word "*replenish*" means to stock with persons.

Marriage is to avoid fornication (First Corinthians 7:2,3). God gave us our bodies and the sexual desire for each other. There is nothing evil, sinful, or shameful regarding the sexual relationship of husband and wife. However, sexual activity outside of marriage, either pre-marital, extra-marital, whatever, is to defile that which God has made sacred and holy. Fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, lesbians, etc, are violators of the holy intent of God and they turn what God purposed to be a beautiful and pure relationship into something reprehensible and filthy.

### **How Long?**

What is to be the duration of marriage? First Corinthians 7:39, *"The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will, only in the Lord."* The last phrase refers to another Christian. Marriage is *"till death do you part."*

Romans 7:1-4 teaches the duration of marriage the same extent, and those who would marry another mate while their first mate lives commits adultery. These passages do not take into consideration the one exception which Jesus taught in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, which we shall consider further in the lesson. But the rule is marriage is for life. Nobody ought to enter marriage with any other design or plan.

### **Divorce**

Does God allow divorce? The answer is a qualified "Yes." Since much of the remaining part of the lesson centers on Matthew 19:3-9, let us focus attention on it.

*"The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?"*

*And he answered and said unto them. Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning, made them male and female,*

*And said, For This cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh?*

*Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.*

*They say unto him, Why then did Moses command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away?*

*He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so.*

*And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery."*

Malachi 2:16 reads, "For the Lord God of Israel saith that he hateth putting away." God will allow divorce, but He does not approve of it. Man ought not put asunder what God has joined.

### **The Exception**

God has allowed one exception to the lifetime duration of a marriage. To deny this exception is as erroneous as to ignore it and divorce for any cause. It is an exceptive clause, which conveys the idea that it presents the only allowance God grants for divorce. This is not a contradiction to Romans 7:1-4 or First Corinthians 7:39, because it takes all that the Lord has taught on a subject to have His full truth.

Fornication, which is illicit sexual conduct with one other than one's mate, such as adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, incest, is the cause for which God will allow the one who is innocent of that sin to divorce the one who is guilty of it.

We note here, and shall explore further, the fact that there are two phrases in Matthew 19:9 and they concern two different people.

What if a person divorces for reasons other than fornication, and marries another? They are living in adultery. That is what the passage teaches. Can one live in adultery? Paul said they could (Colossians 3:5-7; First Corinthians 6:11). Some object that adultery is an act and one cannot live in an act. But sin is also an act, and one can live in sin (Romans 6:1,2). Sin is not only an act but also a state, a spiritual condition.

Furthermore, the verb phrase "*Committeth adultery*" is in the present tense, and in the original language of the New Testament the present tense carries the idea of a continuing

action, not just a one time intercourse. The Bible is clear. Those who divorce have but one justified cause and that is fornication. To remarry when that is not the cause is to live in adultery. Those who teach otherwise teach people to be comforted in their sin.

### **The Guilty**

Can the person who is guilty of fornication also remarry? It is evident that the one who is not guilty of fornication can remarry. But what of the one whose sin caused the broken marriage? Can they also remarry?

Here is where we must recognize the two phrases of Matthew 19:9. The first phrase concerns the one who puts away a fornicating mate. That person does not commit sin by remarrying. The second phrase concerns the one who is put away because they are guilty of fornication. There is no exception given to that person. There is no right granted to them to remarry. Rather it is stated that they, and the one who marries them, commit adultery. Nothing is clearer than this.

But someone asks, "How can one be loosed from the other and have the right to remarry and the other not be loosed from the one? It seems if one is loosed, both are loosed." It is true that they are loosed from each other, but neither is loosed from the teaching of God. God allows the one not guilty of fornication to remarry, but He does not so allow the one who has committed the fornication that caused the divorce. They are still tied to God's will even though not to each other.

### **Forgiveness**

If one is divorced for reasons other than fornication, and has remarried, cannot they be forgiven? Yes, they can be forgiven when the terms and conditions of forgiveness are met. Some think that because one has remarried that the marriage must be acceptable to God. Just because the Bible speaks of one as married does not mean that the marriage is approved of God. The Bible speaks of prophets, but not all prophets are approved of God. The Bible speaks of the gospel, but there is a perverted gospel. The Bible speaks of marriages, but not all marriages are what God will accept. One must not assume that a remarriage is acceptable just because it is called a marriage.

One of the conditions of forgiveness of sins is repentance.

This demands a change of mind that results in a change of life. One cannot continue in sin and claim to have repented. A liar cannot keep on lying. A thief cannot continue to steal. Nor can one in adultery continue living in adultery. The relationship is sinful and must be abandoned.

But what if one has been baptized since he was divorced and remarried? When one is baptized, past sins are forgiven, but not future sins. Baptism does not change an adulterous relationship into a holy and sacred one. Baptism does not change one's marriageability. Baptism does not make lying into something honorable. It does not make stealing acceptable. It does not make adultery an acceptable marriage.

### ***"Whosoever"***

The teaching of Christ regarding marriage applies to all mankind. Some refer to the teaching of Jesus as a "covenant passage," meaning that the teaching only applies to Christians. But Jesus said His will was as God had decreed it *"from the beginning."* If the teaching of Jesus only applies to the Christian, then nobody who is not a Christian has to conform to anything the Lord has taught. This is ridiculous. If the Lord's will regarding the sanctity of marriage only applies to the Christian, then nobody who is not a Christian could commit fornication, adultery, or any other sin. But we know such a position is absurd. In baptism, the blood of Christ washes away sins, but one cannot return to his sins and be thought delivered from them (Romans 6:1,2).

But what if children are involved in the second marriage? This is a circumstance that makes matters more difficult, but it does not change the teaching of God. In any divorce, or even the death of a mate, when there are children it makes matters more difficult. We are not insensitive to the hardships involved. But we are not blinded by the emotions that are involved to dismiss the teaching either. Nor does anyone have the right to dismiss the teaching of Christ because children are involved.

We can see this more readily if we consider bigamy, pologamy, homosexuality, or some other sinful relationship. We would not entertain the doctrine that one who is guilty of such sins can be baptized and then return to those same sinful relationships acceptably. Then why should anyone think a person could return to adultery? Baptism does not make adultery into a marriage acceptable to God. Those who teach

otherwise teach a false doctrine that will cause many who believe and follow it to be lost. Too often religious teachers attempt to accomodate sinful circumstances rather than teach people how to be saved.

## **Desertion**

Is not desertion scriptural grounds for divorce? To be sure, desertion is a sin (First Timothy 5:8). But it is not grounds for divorce. But one asks about First Corinthians 7:15. Let us read the passage. *“But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.”*

What is the “bondage” of this verse? It is a bondage of slavery. It refers to a bondage under which the Christian has not lived to his or her mate. Marriage is not a master-slave relationship. The word translated “bondage” is found 134 times in the New Testament and in the 133 other times it never refers to the marriage bond. But in this chapter the marriage bond is mentioned twice, but with a different word altogether. The marriage bond is from “*deo*” while the bondage of First Corinthians 7:15 is from “*doulou*.” Should an unbeliever desert his Christian mate, the Christian must remember that he is a servant of Christ, and must not abandon Christ simply to hold on to this unbelieving mate. Let him go. One is never so bound to a mate as to be justified in leaving Christ. Nothing is said of divorce in this chapter, but rather, in the event of separation of a Christian from his or her mate, the admonition is that there are two alternatives open: (1) be reconciled to the mate, or (2) remain unmarried. A divorce and remarriage is not given as an acceptable alternative. Only fornication is the grounds for divorce in the Scriptures.

Should a Christian who is married to a non-Christian leave the non-Christian? The answer is “No.” (First Corinthians 7:12-14). If the non-Christian mate is content to dwell with the Christian, then remain together. If the non-Christian wishes to leave, rather than forsake Christ, the Christian should let them leave. The Christian should bend every effort to convert the unconverted mate (First Peter 3:1,2).

A far better solution to this problem is to marry one who is a Christian. One has calculated that seven out of ten who marry outside the church will eventually leave the church. Only one in six convert their mates. What a spiritual risk to the Christian, and

to children that may be born into a divided religious home. We cannot overemphasize the extent of folly in marrying outside of Christ.

### **When Married?**

When is one married? This may seem a rather peculiar question, but with the barrage against the very institution of marriage, we must consider it. Some have scoffed at marriage, asking, "What difference does a piece of paper make? What difference does a ceremony make? Why not just begin living together?" We would like someone to tell us the difference between whoremongering and living in adultery and fornication than the lifestyle that allows two people to just start living together without the benefit of being married.

The difference is that one is according to God's law and the other is a violation of God's law. That may not make much difference to the ungodly, but it makes a difference to those who respect God. Christians will obey the laws of the land. (Romans 13:1; First Peter 2:13,14). God is the One who performed the first "ceremony." A ceremony is bringing one to the other in recognition of a new relationship. God is the first to do this (Genesis 2:22). He saw fit to denote a point when the relationship is a reality, and so should we.

Some have suggested that marriage does not exist until sexually consummated. But if that is true, what you have is two single people coming together into a sexual relationship. That is fornication, not marriage. Sexual relationship is a privilege of marriage, not that which makes one married. Joseph and Mary were married before they came together. If one is not married until there is sexual intercourse, and upon intercourse there is marriage, then every fornicator becomes married when he or she commits fornication. That is absurd.

When the preacher, or whoever performs the ceremony in marriage says, "I pronounce you husband and wife..." then the two are married, not before, and not at some later point. The ceremony is the point of commitment being recognized and the point where the relationship is changed. Should the groom die immediately prior to that pronouncement, the prospective bride is not a widow. But if he dies immediately thereafter, she is a widow. Even the inheritance laws of the land admit this.

### **Right To Marry**

Who has the right of marriage? There are three classes of people who have the right to marry according to God's will. One, those who have never married (First Corinthians 7:36). Two, those who have married but their mates have died (Romans 7:5; First Corinthians 7:39). Three, those who have married but are divorced because they put away their mate because the mate was guilty of fornication. The Scriptures do not grant the privilege of marriage to any others. Respect for this teaching will prevent and resolve many of the marital problems now in existence.

Marriage is not an obligation, but a privilege. One does not sin to marry, nor does one sin to not marry. But if one marries, they are obligated to obey God's will regulating it. When one is married, they are obligated to live according to the law governing marriage.

There ought be no division over such an important matter. There is no cause for controversy, no room for compromise. Homes, souls, the eternal destiny of untold numbers of people may well be determined by the acceptance or rejection of the teaching of the Bible regarding marriage.

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Even though there are innumerable passages that teach the possibility of apostasy and that a child of God can be lost, how many times does God have to teach us something before we accept it? If we do not accept His Word one place, will we accept it if He repeats Himself over and over again?

### **Conclusion**

(from page 24)

What conclusions must be drawn from this information presented? God's child may sin in both body and spirit. The spirit is responsible for the sins of the body. The spirit must overcome lust, the desires of the flesh, else the child of God, once saved from past sins, can return to that from which he was washed and be lost. If this is not true, why all the warnings in every New Testament book against falling away? Why all the exhortations to faithfulness? Why the condemnation of hypocrisy, lukewarmness and apostasy? Such would be needless and useless. The doctrine once saved, always saved is false, misleading, deceptive and we should never allow ourselves to be

(continued page 16)

# ***Revival Under Josiah***

We read of the reign of Josiah in Second Kings 22 through 23:28. At the time of our lesson Israel had long ago become divided into two nations, Northern Israel and Southern Judah. Northern Israel had been carried into captivity by the Assyrians but Judah still survived.

Of all the kings of Northern Israel not one is mentioned as being a righteous person or having favor with God. Of the twenty kings of Judah only six are mentioned with praise as serving God faithfully, some of those being guilty of grave errors. Most were like their northern cousins. When leaders of nations are wicked the entire nation suffers. It would be wonderful if Americans could learn this lesson, giving honor to their good leaders and repudiating the wicked.

One of the six mentioned with favor was Josiah. He was actually the best king Judah had since the days of David nearly five centuries earlier. It was under the leadership of Josiah that the last effort of reformation and revival was attempted by Judah before their captivity by the Babylonians. Some success at recovery had been enjoyed under the rule of Hezekiah about one hundred twenty years earlier, but the nation had long since forgotten that restoration. Of Josiah it is said, *"He did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah."*

Josiah's father, Amon, was a very wicked man. He died when Josiah was but eight years of age. Obviously, Josiah was but a figurehead king for some years because of his youth, but his later life reveals that someone who loved the Lord did a good job in planting a love for God and God's will in Josiah's heart. He *"walked in all the way of David... turned not aside to the right hand or to the left."*

## **Josiah's Acts**

When he was twenty-six years old he asked for an accounting of the money in the Lord's treasury. To fully appreciate the significance of this act, we must recall what had been done during the previous reign. Worship had been neglected; the temple allowed to fall into a state of bad repair; copies of the Law of Moses had been destroyed; idols and high places for idolatrous worship had been erected; and there had been a

fanatical suppression of the worship of Jehovah. This accounting was a tremendous turn-around from previous years. But it proved to be only the beginning of the efforts put forth for revival by Josiah.

During the next thirteen years the temple was repaired. Carpenters, builders, hewers of stone were employed and the breaches repaired. The entire area was restored to a reasonable facsimile of its former radiance and grandeur. The idols were destroyed in the land that had been built to the sun, moon and stars, being ground into powder. Baal, Ashteroth, Asherah, and other heathen gods of Israel's neighbors were brought down. The altars to false worship were removed. The tombs of the former idolatrous leaders were defiled and their bones scattered. Remembrance of God's prophets was restored and they were once again respected.

The houses of wickedness were also brought down and idolatrous priests were slain. Multitudes began to forsake their evil ways and worship Jehovah. God's priests were raised to their former distinction. The Passover was observed according to the Law. It is thrilling to read the step by step procedure led by Josiah that brought a wholesome religious revival to the people of the land. It is described as being like nothing else that had ever taken place in Israel because of its completeness, vigor, and devotion. Nothing compared with it in Israel or Judah since the days of Israel's glory under David and Solomon when the nation was united under one monarch and faithful to God.

### **Why The Revival?**

What caused this great revitalization? True, it was the work of Josiah. But what caused Josiah to become so devoted to this task of rebuilding Judah and bringing it back to God? The answer is found in one of the most interesting and strange events recorded in the Old Testament.

We mentioned how previous rulers had attempted to destroy copies of the Law of Moses. But when Josiah commanded an accounting of the money and a repair of the temple, a copy of the Law was found that had evidently been hidden during the period of destruction. God's book had become "lost" but was found again (Second Kings 22:8).

The book was given to ~~Hilkiah~~ <sup>Hilkiah</sup>, a priest, then to a scribe named Shaphan, and eventually to Josiah the king. Together they began studying the Word of God. The reaction of Josiah to what

he learned is in verse eleven, *"And it came to pass when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes."* Why did he have such a reaction? Verse 13, *"...for great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us."* Josiah took notice of the wide variance between what the people were and what God's Word said they ought to be. He was extremely troubled by it. He then set things in motion to correct a very deplorable condition.

He called for the priest to inquire of God what to do to bring Judah once again into His favor. Briefly speaking, the answer he got is seen in what he spent the rest of his life doing.

### **What He Did**

How did he bring Judah back to God? What measures did he take? To summarize the activity, (1) he warred against every evil in every way; (2) he held high that which was holy before God; (3) he rebuilt the symbols of righteousness; (4) he had the Law of Moses read publicly and regularly to all the people that they might know the will of the Lord. (Second Kings 23:1,2).

That which really caused this great revival was hearing, believing and obeying the Word of the Lord. The Word rediscovered, studied, accepted and applied by men who were honest, courageous, energetic enough to expedite and follow through what the Word of the Lord demanded was what produced the revival. The people were wanting and willing to obey God. Without this disposition there could have been no revival. All the vital factors were present.

Let us make an application of what we learn. Is it not true that most of the world does not know the true and living God of heaven? The day I set this type it is calculated that there are now five billion people on this globe. How many know not the Lord? Can we doubt the increasingly reprehensible conditions in the homes even in our own land of freedom and blessing? What is the genuine spirituality in the churches? Is the nation really concerned about morality? Many who have heard of the Lord do not believe and accept His authority. Many who claim to believe in Christ are torn asunder by division, pride, denominationalism, following the doctrines of men, failing to settle upon the divine standard, the Bible, as the all-sufficient rule. Even those who profess to follow the doctrine of Christ

faithfully are often complacent, indifferent, steeped in relaxation and satisfaction, resting and at ease. As in the days of Josiah at the beginning of the revival, we stand in need of a great spiritual awakening also, one that can be produced only by a devotion to, knowledge of, and submission to the will of the Lord.

"But the task is so large it seems hopeless." Such is often argued. Many contend the world cannot be changed. Admittedly, the situation is a desperate one and the task is of gigantic proportions, especially when we view the entire scene. Fortunately for us, our success is not solely dependent upon the results of our efforts as much as our efforts put forth. We may not accomplish all we wish we could, not even very much, but unless we try we are automatically failures before God.

### **Turning Things Around**

But how can we turn things around in this sin-torn world? There is only one way open to us. That way is, in principle, like that which was exercised by Josiah. There must be a rediscovery of the message of the Word of God. Even though there are copies of God's Word in houses of worship and in multitudes of homes, it is a book that often goes unread, unstudied, unknown and unapplied. It is not because the truth will not accomplish what is needed that it gathers dust. It is because the Bible goes untried and people simply neither know it nor follow it.

The Word must be studied and revered, believed and accepted, and then assuredly applied. Individually and collectively, this is a necessity. This means that we must not only theoretically accept the truth, but in reality of daily living and practice.

Just look at the many people of honesty, courage, energy and determination that promoted the Word of God among the people in the day of Josiah. We must be as they were. When we are, we will see results from our efforts as did they. So many who profess to be Christians are guilty of adding to the decline of righteousness in this world through their neglect and failure to put the things of God first in their lives.

The only power to save mankind is the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16). When that gospel is preached, it will be heard. When heard, some will believe and will subsequently obey and come to know the joy of salvation. Whether anyone ever responds favorably to the call of Christ that comes through the gospel or not, it is our duty and privilege to take the Word to the

world. Is there any other means of producing the spiritual awakening that the world needs so badly in our own time?

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## ***The Gospel Taken To Samaria***

Our text is lengthy and you are urged to read Acts 8:1-24 before proceeding with this lesson.

The Lord's church was probably about one year old, having begun in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost following the Lord's ascension. Christians had been scattered due to persecution. One territory, called Samaria, the name of both a province and a city, was inhabited by people of mixed blood, that is, they were descendents of imported foreigners and Israelites left behind in the Assyrian deportation of the ten tribes of Northern Israel. It was about fifty-five miles north of Jerusalem, situated between Judea and Galilee. The citizens had come from immigrants sent by Assyria to colonize the area vacated by the ten tribes.

There was strong and ill feeling between the Jews and Gentiles. But in some ways, the feeling was even worse between Jews and the Samaritans. It stemmed from the desire of Samaritans to assist the Jews in rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple when the Jews returned from Babylonian captivity. Their request was denied because they were not "true blue Jew." Six hundred years of hostility had accumulated to the time of Jesus Christ.

### **Samaritan Religion**

The Samaritans practiced a form of worship of Jehovah, having been taught certain tenets of the Jewish faith by a Jewish priest many years earlier. They even accepted a part of the Jewish Scriptures, but not all. They had come to anticipate the advent of the Messiah, which they believed would include them.

Therefore, they shared with the Jews many common convictions. But they had their own temple in Mt. Gerizim and worshipped not in Jerusalem.

Jesus had dealt with Samaritans both favorably and unfavorably. In Luke 9, He was refused permission to stay among them overnight, which provoked the reaction of James and John to petition the Lord to call down fire upon them. Jesus made journeys around the territory as He traveled between Galilee and Judea in order to avoid conflict. He had met with a Samaritan woman and taught her many things at Jacob's well. (John 4). There He showed Himself to be a prophet and claimed to be the Messiah long anticipated. The people came from the city of Samaria to inquire of Him and believed on Him. Jesus had also used the Samaritans as good examples in His teaching, such as in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

When Jesus gave the great commission, He said, *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."* (Mark 16:15). *"Go ye therefore and teach all nations..."* (Matthew 28:19). When Philip took the gospel to Samaria he was doing what that charge required. While the preparatory work for the kingdom had included preaching principally to the Jews (Matthew 10:5,6), now that the way of salvation had been revealed to mankind, beginning at Pentecost, the gospel was to be preached to one and all. Jesus had said, Acts 1:8, *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."*

### **The Preacher**

Who was Philip? He was one of the seven chosen to care for needy widows in Acts 6. He was of good report, full of the Spirit, and wisdom. Later he is called an evangelist (Acts 21), having four daughters who also prophesied or taught. This is not the same as preaching (the public proclamation of the Word). Philip came to Samaria proclaiming Christ and His kingdom (Acts 8:5,12).

Having had apostolic hands laid on him (Acts 6:6), he was able to perform miracles (8:6,13). The purpose of miracles was to confirm the Word preached (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:1-4). Verse seven tells some of the deeds he performed. The result,

verse 8, *"And there was great joy in that city."*

Among those converted by the efforts of Philip was a man named Simon. He was at the time of his conversion a sorcerer. We shall have more to say concerning him later.

Philip preached, people heard, believed, and were baptized (8:12), both men and women. Nothing is said of children being baptized. We never read in the Bible of infants being baptized, or even sprinkled, and sprinkling is not baptism anyway. But, like the teaching of Christ (Mark 16:16), and Peter on Pentecost (Acts 2:38), Philip taught those who hear and understand to be baptized. It is regrettable that many who claim to preach the gospel will not preach what Philip preached, including Christ, His church, faith, and baptism.

### **Apostles' Visit**

The news of conversions in Samaria reached Jerusalem. Peter and John went there (8:4), and prayed that the Samaritans might receive the Holy Spirit, laying hands on them (8:15-17). They had already received the *"gift of the Holy Spirit"* as a consequence of their obedience to the command to be baptized (Acts 2:38). This referred to the salvation promised (Acts 2:39). What was granted the Samaritans with the laying on of hands was not baptism with the Holy Spirit, as applied to the apostles on Pentecost, but the impartation of miraculous powers which could be given in this way (Acts 19:6; Romans 1:11). While Philip had miraculous powers himself, he obviously did not have the power to impart them to others since he was not an apostle. This was a part of the apostolic work that was exclusive to the apostles. This is why there was no giving of miraculous powers to the Samaritans until the coming of Peter and John. These abilities would then be used by those who received them for the same purposes as they were used by Philip; namely, to confirm the Word as they went forward to preach it.

Returning to Simon for a moment, we read how he believed and was baptized (8:13). According to the teaching of Jesus (Mark 16:16), he was then a saved person. But he wanted the power possessed by the apostles, to lay his hand on others to grant them miraculous abilities (8:18,19). This was an improper request because it was not his work, but belonged only to the apostles. Furthermore, Peter said his heart was not right (8:20,21). Peter's description of his spiritual state was (8:23), *"For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the*

*bond of iniquity.” His instruction to get right again was (8:23), “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.” Simon requested that others pray for him as well.*

### **To Be Restored**

This is a significant teaching. Simon was not commanded to be baptized again, as had been done before he ever came to Christ. Now in Christ, but one who had fallen again into sin, he was told to “*repent...and pray.*” This is the divine plan of restoration for the fallen Christian.

Now the gospel, and the resultant church, had been planted in Samaria. The apostles stayed a while preaching and teaching. Philip was directed to another place, the road between Jerusalem and Gaza where he would later meet the Ethiopian.

### **The Word**

What we learn from this account is the necessity of the preaching of the Word in order for people to be saved. We see the inseparableness of preaching Christ and His church. We must conclude that the gospel is for all, Gentile and Jew, whosoever will. We learn the purpose of miracles, the use of miracles, the passing of power of miracles, and how limited that was, to whom miraculous powers belonged, and to whom belonged the power to impart miraculous powers. We discover what people did to be converted to Christ; hear, believe, and obey, being baptized. We discover what a fallen Christian must do to be recovered; repent and pray.

The account of the gospel taken to Samaria is one of the more complete accounts of evangelism. We need to have an understanding of what took place and how it was accomplished.

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(from page 8)  
victimized by it.

We should not accept the false doctrine once saved, always saved, but neither should we live lives that are out of harmony with the pattern of life defined in Scripture for those who profess to be His disciples.

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# Find A Man

Jeremiah 5:1, *"Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it."*

Those were the words of Jehovah to His prophet Jeremiah, a prophet to Judah in the years immediately preceding Judah's fall before Babylon. The people of Judah were God's chosen people, chosen for the primary purpose that through them God would fulfill His promises to Abraham and bring into the world the Savior of all mankind, Jesus Christ His Son. Yet, the Lord, and Jeremiah, were distressed over the spiritual condition of this nation, and for good reason. These words are a sad commentary on their state. The Lord wanted something, but what He wanted could not easily be found even among His own people.

Note the extent to which Jeremiah was to involve himself in the search for what God wanted: *"Run to and fro through the streets..."*, back and forth, retracing your steps, searching diligently. Go to the broad places, even the market places where many people could be found, looking everywhere. The very nature of the search indicates the scarcity of that which the Lord sought.

## Wanted

What was it the Lord wanted? He said, *"Find a man."* He was not looking for a male human being. Surely, many of them could be located. But He wanted a man of certain qualities of character and spirit. This certain kind of person was one that *"executes judgment,"* or as one translation renders the phrase, *"doing justly."* Also he was to be one who *"seeks the truth."*

To execute judgment meant one that dealt fairly with others, measured all things by God's standard, honest in his word and motive. He was to be what we often refer to as being "above board." You could depend on what he said and did, discharging his duties with responsibility. His word was his bond.

There is so much dishonesty, cheating, lying, stealing, in almost every realm of human activity. Daily we read of people in government, in business, doing things that are dishonest. One of

the tragic ills of mankind is this fundamental fault seen in so many. They simply are not honest people. When any nation reaches the place where honor and integrity are at a scarcity, the nation is in a deplorable spiritual condition.

God also wanted a person who sought the truth. Many of us have never really made a diligent search for what is right and wrong. We deserve no credit for having searched for the truth because we have simply taken what has been handed down to us without investigating what the Word of God teaches. While there is credit due for holding on to truth, how much of an appetite for it do we possess? Do we really hunger and thirst for righteousness? People often shun the truth, ridicule the truth, because they have no real love for truth. I suppose I shall never understand why those who profess to be God's children have to constantly be urged, begged, and pushed to the opportunities for Bible study. Surely, those who seek the truth and wish to know the will of God do not have to be shoved along.

### **Scarcity**

The story is told of an ancient Greek philosopher named Diogenes who went through the streets of his city in daylight with a lighted lantern. When asked what he was doing, he said he was looking for an honest man. In this way he emphasized the scarcity of such people. By the search that Jeremiah was called upon to make, God emphasized the scarcity of the kind of people that were pleasing to Him in the city of Jerusalem. If you and I had lived in Jerusalem at that time, would we have qualified?

Why did the Lord want such a person? It was because his influence could be used to the preservation of the entire body of people. Paul teaches that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump (First Corinthians 5:6). He was speaking of how the influence of evil can contaminate the whole body. But it is also true that good influence can sometimes be used to make things better. Bad can defile the good, but good can also drive out the evil when properly administered. Jerusalem, though warned of their impending doom because of their sins, could have been spared if they would only turn from their sinful manners and return to God. But who was there among them that could be used for this purpose?

### **Their Sins**

As we read in Jeremiah, chapter five, we learn of many of the abominations that characterized Jerusalem at this time. In verse two, they swore by their false gods, and in verse 3, they refused to be corrected. There are some people that just will not listen. They would not see with their eyes, nor hear with their ears. Their heart was hardened and closed. They were a revolting and rebellious people. In verse four, they were foolish, not knowing the way of Jehovah, but they could have known as verse five teaches. In verse six, their transgressions were many, and they were backsliders. Even their great ones failed them. Verse seven, they were guilty of forsaking the needy and were overrunning with iniquity. Indeed, the spiritual state of Judah was one that grieved the heart of God and His prophet.

Someone has rightly said that the trouble with Judah can be defined with a set of "P's"; their priests, prophets, princes, and people were polluted. The nation was almost like Elijah once thought Israel to be; namely, totally against God and none to follow Him except Elijah. While that later proved not to be exactly the case, the condition of the nation was one that could only lead to the doom predicted for it.

### **Religious People**

Please take note that these were not irreligious people. God did not tell Jeremiah to find a religious person. There were plenty of those all around. But being religious and being righteous are not always the same. The people of Judah, like the Pharisees in Jesus' day, conformed to many ceremonies and rituals, going through religious forms, but their heart and manner of life was evil. Are there not possibly many in churches today of whom just such an evaluation could also be given? Many people seem to have the idea that their religion should not interfere with their life. But let me ask, "Is there any realm, any activity, anything in which a Christian involves himself or herself that is not to be governed by the faith he professes?" Can you name anything in the life of a Christian that ought not be regulated by the fact that he or she is a Christian? Our habits, words, thoughts, actions, associations, everything and anything must be under the umbrella of the truth that we are people of God and should conduct ourselves accordingly. If that is not as it ought to be, what is the value of following Christ in this life? While we properly observe the ceremony and ritual that is a part of worship and New Testament Christianity, should it not

determine how we live at all times?

### **God's Love**

But it is amazing to note that in spite of all this wickedness among the people, God still loved Judah. No, He did not approve of them, but He did love them and did not want to punish them. The reason He wanted to find this certain quality of person was so that from that person and with such an influence there might be a change among the manners of the people and they could be spared. Destruction was not the Lord's desire, but He longed to save them from their fate. As Peter wrote, the Lord is not willing that any should perish but encourages mankind to repent.

This attitude was seen when Christ prayed over the city of Jerusalem. The people could have been gathered by the Lord, but they would not have it so (Matthew 23:37). It is a wonderful thought to know how the love of God extends to us even while we are yet sinners. If only we would appreciate that love sufficiently to take advantage of the salvation He offers us.

It is inescapable for us to miss the emphasis of the value of a good person in this lesson. Sometimes we may conclude that we are so small and insignificant in this world that what we do and say really does not matter. But that is a false conclusion. There is no such thing as an unimportant person. Especially is this true among the righteous. Good people can be used by the Lord to bring salvation to all.

Consider the time when God told Abraham that He would not destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah if only ten righteous souls could be found. Unfortunately, they could not be found and the entire people perished.

### **Be One**

I would persuade you that if the freedoms and the blessings of our own land are to be preserved for the oncoming generations, it is the responsibility of the present age to be righteous and do good. Those of the degenerate conduct cannot save our land. They have within them the seeds of death, not preservation and life. The value of being good is not only for our personal benefit, but for those who follow after us and those who live among us. Evidently, there was an insufficiency of good people in Jerusalem because it soon fell beneath the mighty power and

destruction of the Babylonians.

One has said that man has learned to swim through the water like a fish, and fly through the air like a bird, but has yet to learn how to walk on the earth like a man. Certainly many do not know how to walk like the man God sought.

But that day of Jerusalem has long since passed and those people failed to heed their warning. What of those of us living today? Shall we profit from their mistake or shall we persist in our own way and make the same mistake they made to our destruction and that of others? It is a decision each must make and for which each shall be held accountable.

† † † † †

## ***May God's Child Be Lost?***

Ezekiel 18:20, "*The soul that sinneth, it shall die.*" This has reference to a spiritual death, separation from God. This principle is emphasized in both the Old and New Testaments. "*The wages of sin is death.*" (Romans 6:23). But does it apply to the child of God?

It is contended by many that once you become a child of the Lord there is nothing that can cause you to be lost in eternal doom. Even some who say they do not believe that doctrine act as if they believe it. It is admittedly a very comforting doctrine, if it is true. Little wonder that it is popular with many people.

But the question that remains on the lips of honest inquirers, "What, if anything, happens to that child who walks after the flesh? What of that Christian who turns back again into the paths of sin and remains there until death overtakes him?" While there are so-called proofs offered by religious people to show "once saved, always saved," we need to investigate not only these so-called proofs but see what the message of the Word of God really is on the subject.

### **The Doctrine And Influence**

The doctrine is that once a person has become a child of God, God cannot and will not disinherit him regardless of what he says or does. It is said that the soul is cleansed, born again,

and therefore not responsible for the actions of the flesh. It is admitted that the flesh sins by the advocates of this doctrine, but we are told that the soul of man is not responsible and the flesh is not subject to God. This is one of the tenets of Calvinism and is taught as truth by many prominent denominational bodies. We are told that the flesh is destroyed in death because of its sins, but the soul, once reborn, can never be lost.

Consider for a moment the influence of such a doctrine. Why does it not tend to create on the part of one who claims to be saved an indifference toward his behavior and conduct, seeing that it does not matter regarding his salvation anyway? Regardless of pious denials to the contrary, regardless of what one might intend with such a doctrine, the inevitable and ultimate result of this doctrine will provoke people who think they are saved to cease their vigilance toward sin. Why should they be concerned about it anymore? If only my flesh sins, not my soul, and I cannot be lost whatever I do, and because the fault lies with the flesh and not the soul, where is the motivation to live a godly life? What would cause one to ever be concerned anymore about his spiritual welfare? If I already have that for which I hope, I no longer hope for it. But Paul says we are still hoping and have not yet attained. (Philippians 3:12; Romans 8:24; Titus 1:2; 2:13).

The influence has been to create hypocrisy, sin among the ranks of those who claim to be saved, wickedness tolerated in the church that professes this doctrine, and all of this without any fear of any recompense or punishment. The teaching that a child of God cannot fall is one of the major contributing factors for the lack of spirituality among religious people today.

E. R. Harper told of talking with some men and their conversation included a discussion about drinking alcoholic beverages, dancing, unfair business deals, and similarly worldly transgressions. As they separated, one of the men dropped a paper and he handed back to him. The man explained it was his Sunday school lesson for the next week. The man had agreed that these sins of the world were practiced among some Christians but that there was nothing for the Christian to be worried about concerning them because of the doctrine of once saved, always saved. Is it any wonder that more and more religious people promote these evils, participate in them, and demand that preachers soft-pedal condemnation of them if mentioned at all? Such thinking will not be tolerated among people who are faithful to the doctrine of Christ. It is a tragedy

that even among many in the churches of Christ who deny the doctrine under consideration are those who are engaged in such worldly evils. They cannot be saved pursuing such a path of life.

By a side statement here pertaining to another issue only related to our major theme, let me say to those who use beer, liquor, whiskey and other strong drinks, those who dance, gamble and the like, you may not be a gangster, a renegade, a drunkard wallowing in the gutter, or unfaithful sexually to your mate, but neither are you serving Christ faithfully. For one who professes to be a follower of Christ and still indulge in such things is as inconsistent to the truth as darkness is to light. Those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19ff).

### **Let the Bible Speak**

Will you allow the Bible and inspired men to speak concerning the way of life following the flesh? Will you let their words be your convictions and answers to the question under discussion?

#### **Paul**

Romans 6:12,13, *"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin; but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God."* Can we see that sins of the flesh prohibit one from yielding to God? How can such a one be saved in that condition? This was written to Christians already in the fold of Christ.

First Corinthians 6:19,20, *"What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God, and 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."* One must glorify God in both body and spirit. Who dares to say what one does does not have effect on one's relationship with God in light of this passage? The body is to be controlled by the spirit and the spirit is responsible for the body.

Second Corinthians 7:1,2, *"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Receive*

*us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man.*" Again, words as these are to Christians and are exhortations to cleanse themselves in both body and spirit. There are sins of the flesh and sins of the spirit. Christ's apostle warns against them both. Christ said, Matthew 10:28, *"Be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul, but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."* He was speaking to His people, the apostles. It is nonsense to say that the soul can be saved because it has no responsibility for the works of the flesh.

### **John**

There are so many passages that refute the doctrine of once saved, always saved, that we must be selective. *"My little children,"* those who have fellowship with God, are warned (First John 1:6-10), *"If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth; 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. If we say that 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."* Who can read these words and doubt that even children of God can and do sin, and because of sin be lost? Unless sins are confessed they are not forgiven, and if not forgiven, how can we be saved?

### **Peter**

Second Peter 2:20-22 is a passage no advocate of the doctrine once saved, always saved shall ever be able to nullify. *"For if after they have escaped from the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."* Read it and be convinced of the truth!

(continued page 8)



## ***What Our Example Says***

Recently a preacher told me of a sermon he preached that asked if brethren would really want him to preach what they practice. We have heard about practicing what you preach, but what would brethren think if preachers began preaching what is so often practiced? I have a strong suspicion that this would not be acceptable. Then why do we think what we practice is acceptable before God?



**JAMES W. BOYD**

We do not properly consider the weight of influence and the demonstration of what we say we believe. How can one who says their love for Christ and the church is first and expect others to believe it, and others to be impressed with the glory of the church, when they are quite prone to putting the church, the worship of God, the study of His Word in a secondary position. It is shocking how some professed Christians not only do not show by their example that the Lord is first, but indicate they really have no intention of making Him first. Is their example, especially before the young, the lost, and the world, the kind of example that glorifies the Lord? Or do they say, by their works, that they really do not believe their words? Think about it!

\* \* \* \* \*

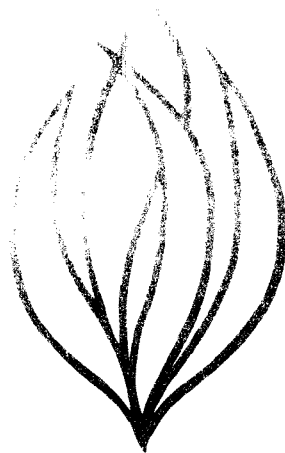
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# A Burning Fire

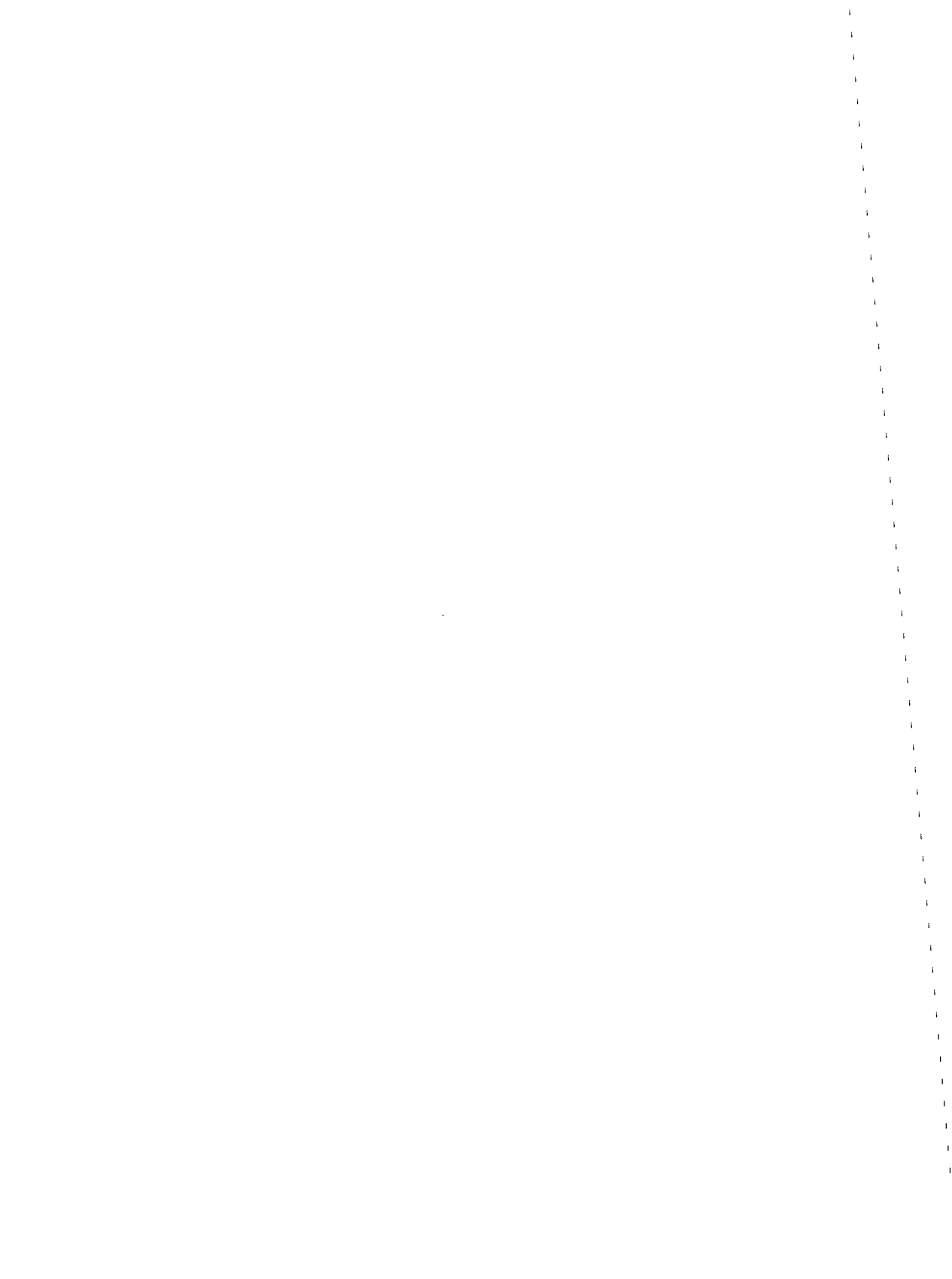


“But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay.” (Jeremiah 20:9).

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# **Godly Motherhood**

There are radicals who scoff at motherhood, denouncing the role of mother as something inferior to the glamourized careers in the world. But in our nation there is still a day set aside each year when everyone is called upon to pause and render honor to motherhood, each one's mother in particular. It is called "Mother's Day." It is not a religious ceremonial day, but it is a tradition when mothers are honored in special ways. While there is no Biblical authority to respect one Lord's Day above another, and Mother's Day is usually a Sunday, it is fitting and proper for us to meditate upon what the Bible teaches regarding motherhood.

One preacher honored his mother by saying, "My mother practices what I preach." Surely motherhood is one of the greatest roles God has conferred upon any human being. It is the task of building a life. As is true with all tremendous honors and privileges, there accompanies it awesome responsibilities. While father and mother are to share in bringing the child into the world and in the training of their children, the mother has a work and exerts an influence that cannot be done as effectively by any other person. She performs a service and looks well to her household where she reigns as queen of her castle, however humble that place might be.

## **The Lord's Return**

In order for a mother to be a godly mother she needs a pattern to follow, and the Lord has provided His pattern with both instructions and records of examples what mothers should be. There is Mary, the mother of Jesus, who was submissive to God's plan and to whom even the Son of God was subject in her early years. There was Lois, the mother of the evangelist, Timothy, who taught him the scriptures from his youth. We read of Sarah, Rachel, Mary, the mother of John Mark, each of them demonstrating exceptional qualities of character that go to making a woman and mother approved of God. There is another mother which shall be the center of our focus in this lesson of whom we read in the Old Testament and her name is Hannah, the wife of Elkanah, the mother of Samuel.

Hannah, though childless, longed for a child and prayed to God that she might have a child. She did not want the child for

her own sake, but that she might consecrate her child to the service of the Lord and that he might live his life to the glory of God. Hannah's child was the fruit of prayer, having prayed when she was at the house of worship.

At a very early age, Samuel was brought to the priest, Eli, where he would live, be trained in God's service, and be used the way God saw fit. Hannah was certainly a godly mother in that she was a worshipper of the true and living God of heaven, a prayerful woman, unselfish, and one who realized that her offspring belonged to God and should be used to God's glory.

The giving of her child the way she did was the utmost in personal sacrifice and self-denial. It was a heroic deed. She deprived herself of her dear child and her eyes would not daily see the light and joy of her child's face. While this kind of deprivation is not demanded of young mothers today, her self-abnegation reveals a devotion to the highest interest of both God and her son. She sought the best for the child, which is the manifestation of love. Every father and mother ought give their child to the service of God and when they do, both they and the child shall be honored.

Samuel became the great Samuel of Israel. His manliness, purity, justice, dignity, devotion to the highest and best interest of his people, his dedication to the heavenly Father, his stout vindication and defense of the ways of God may be traced to the deep piety and supreme faith and devotion to duty that characterized his mother. There is the old saying, "As the twig is bent, so grows the tree." Hannah bent the twig and Samuel became a mighty tree of righteousness.

### **From The Home**

We live in a threatening period of human history unlike that which has gone before us in many ways. We should be concerned that our nation and the freedoms enjoyed herein be preserved for our descendants. This conservative and preservative influence will not come from the law-making halls of Congress, or the state legislatures. It will not be from the factories and schools, or even the launching pads and computer panels. It is not to come through armies and weapons, though they have their place. It will come from our homes, the basic and fundamental unit of society. The homes of our nation bear the imprint of the character of mothers, just as all the rest of society bears the imprint of the home. The stream cannot rise

above the fountain. The home is that fountain of the stream of national life. Mothers, more than any other special segment of society, can make the home as it ought to be. This is not to dismiss the father or other needed influences, but is said to emphasize the majestic and mighty role of motherhood in the land.

### **Need For Mothers**

This role cannot be properly filled with mothers who love the sinful things of this world, who are given to their own selfish interests above the welfare of their households. Mothers who grant their children unlimited indulgence will not guide their children aright. Selfishness cannot get the task accomplished. Nor can children be abandoned to the follies and vices of a degenerate age. Mothers must implant in the hearts and minds of their offspring the standards of God.

Mothers will never do the work they must do when they deliberately leave their posts of duty to the neglect of their primary work in the home. While we realize this is a message that is unheeded and unwanted in our present society, it is still the message people need to hear and heed. The cultivation of selfish ambitions rather than cultivating in their children the ambition to do right and be right before God is to fail in the divinely assigned task of motherhood. What many females today have not realized is that what is called "women's liberation" is more often a return to the bondage of sin, a government for self, a repudiation of the high and holy for the beggarly rudiments this world temporarily offers.

The trail of heartbreak and agony, ruined lives, broken homes, is too pronounced for us to ever expect mothers can mold their children as they ought when they are in pursuit of lesser goals than godly motherhood. History as well as inspired Scripture bears this truth out to us.

While some complain that the sternness of spirit and the rigor of discipline in the old Puritan homes was extreme, it obviously was vastly better than the lawlessness and indulgent homes of the present. At least there was the respect of God and the family. There was the dignity of the home, a reverence toward the sanctity of marriage, a righteous upbringing of the young, a relative absence of divorce and delinquency. In our modern "progress" we are being inundated with broken homes, careers, "latch-key" children, immoralities, disrespect for authority, the

murder of unborn children by abortion, and millions of run-aways who no longer can tolerate the sorry conditions imposed on them by those who should provide a wholesome home.

### **Which Direction?**

There is no denial that homes of the past as a rule produced firm and noble characters. Yes, "You've come a long way, baby," but who has stopped to consider the direction you have been going? If there is no call for the sternness of yesteryear and those other righteous qualities that were evident, there is a call to exercise greater vigilance than has been of late. There is the need for the maintenance of authority, the respect for which is learned at home. Disrespect for authority is also learned at home. There is the need for the cultivation of moral and religious training that must begin and continue in the home. There is the need for emphasis on an intelligent and fervent piety that will lead fathers, mothers, and children to reverence God. There is the demand that parents protect their children from the ravages of evil even as they teach them the difference between right and wrong. There is the urgency to show them the dignity of work and the danger of idleness, pride, dishonesty, and the attitude that everybody owes me something. To a great extent what is most needful can and should be supplied by the mothers, godly mothers.

### **Sowing and Reaping**

What we sow, we reap. That is true in every realm, and in no realm is it more evident than in the family unit and development, in which the mother is a major component. Many mothers sow in tears, work, self-denial, pain and sacrifice but they will reap in joy and find their highest happiness when they can see the purity, nobility, goodness and Christlikeness in the lives of her children. Proverbs 31:28, *"Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her."* Possibly in this matter above all others it can be said of the godly mother, *"Thou excellest them all."* (Proverbs 31:29). The world groans and agonizes in need of godly mothers who instill in the hearts and lives of their children the righteousness of God.

Rather than simply having the capacity to reproduce, or to be glamorous, greedy, grasping for gain and glory, we need

mothers whose goal is godliness. The following parable, written by Temple Bailey, presents what should be the ambition of every mother regarding her children.

The young mother set her foot on the path of life. "Is the way long?" she asked.

And her Guide said, "Yes, and the way is hard. And you will be old before you reach the end of it. But the end will be better than the beginning."

But the young Mother was happy, and she would not believe that anything could be better than these years. So she played with her children, and gathered flowers for them along the way, and bathed with them in the clear streams; and the sun shone on them, and life was good, and the young Mother cried, "Nothing will ever be lovelier than this."

The night came, and storm, and the path was dark, and the children shook with fear and cold, and the Mother drew them close and covered them with her mantle, and the children said, "Oh, Mother, we are not afraid, for you are near, and no harm can come," and the Mother said, "This is better than the brightness of day, for I have taught my children courage."

And the morning came, and there was a hill ahead, and the children climbed and grew weary, and the Mother was weary, but at all times she said to the children, "A little patience, and we are there." So the children climbed, and when they reached the top, they said, "We could not have done it without you, Mother." And the Mother, when she lay down that night, looked up at the stars, and said, "This is a better day than the last, for my children have learned fortitude in the face of hardness. Yesterday I gave them courage. Today I have given them strength."

And the next day came strange clouds which darkened the earth--clouds of war and hate and evil, and the children groped and stumbled, and the Mother said: "Look up. Lift your eyes to the

Light.” And the children looked and saw above the clouds an Everlasting Glory, and it guided them and brought them beyond the darkness. And that night the Mother said, “This is the best day of all, for I have shown my children God.”

And the days went on, and the weeks, and the months, and the years, and the Mother grew old, and she was little and bent. But her children were tall and strong, and walked with courage. And when the way was hard, they helped their Mother: and when the way was rough, they lifted her, for she was as light as a feather; and at last they came to a hill and beyond the hill they could see a shining road and golden gates flung wide.

And the Mother said, “I have reached the end of my journey. And now I know that the end is better than the beginning, for my children can walk alone, and their children after them.”

And the children said, “You will always walk with us, Mother, even when you have gone through the gates.”

And they stood and watched her as she went on alone, and the gates closed after her. And they said: “We cannot see her, but she is with us still. A Mother like ours is more than a memory. She is a Living Presence.”

### **Honor Due**

So as the world may honor mothers on “Mother’s Day,” we who are Christians go a step further and honor those mothers who show God to her children in word, attitude, and deed. Many of us have been blessed with God’s boundless favor by having a godly mother. Some hold them today only in memory. Many a lady has the privilege of being a godly mother. Some have children who are now grown and others still with infants. We pray that the influence of godly mothers might increase in our world. “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.” May we ever proclaim throughout the world, “*Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.*” (Proverbs 31:30).

† † † † †

# ***Paul's Sermon In Antioch About Christ***

One of the best ways to learn the message of the New Testament is to study the sermons preached by the inspired men of God on the subject of Jesus Christ. This is what we propose to do in this lesson, taking as our text the lengthy reading of Acts 13:16-41, which you are urged to read in its entirety.

Paul and Barnabas were on what is known as their first missionary journey. They had enjoyed success at Salamis in Cyprus; had encountered Elymas when teaching Sergius Paulas at Paphos; John Mark had turned back from going with them, and they were now in the city of Antioch of Pisidia, to be distinguished from Antioch of Syria where the disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11:26).

Paul went to the Jewish synagogue, as he often did, not to worship according to the Jewish system, but to take advantage of the opportunity afforded him to speak on behalf of Christ. His sermon can be divided into four major parts and we shall consider it verse by verse.

## **Part I**

The first portion deals with a recounting of God's dealing with Israel until Christ (verses 16-26). He addressed the people as "*men of Israel*" and called for their attention. He reminded them how God had chosen their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and exalted Israel in Egypt, eventually delivering them from Egyptian bondage. He covered many years of Israelite history with a few words.

He mentioned the forty years wandering in the wilderness, their period of service under the judges, the last of whom was Samuel. Then he turned his attention to the selection of their first king, Saul, and his rule for forty years. He next mentioned David and how God intended to fulfill His will through David.

God had made great promises to Abraham (Genesis 12,15,17,18,22). The greatest of these was the promise that "*in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.*" (Genesis 12:3). This blessing was to be through "*his seed,*" (Genesis 22:18), which Paul said referred to Christ (Galatians 3:16).

David was of the seed of Abraham and Christ was of the seed of David.

Paul also mentioned how God, through David's seed would fulfill His promise of the Savior to come. That Savior is Jesus Christ. Obviously, Paul only "hit the high points" in the recollection of Israel's history because their history was not his major theme. It is not that the portions he omitted are unimportant, but his focus was on Christ and he was establishing the connection between Abraham, David, and Christ and the promise God had made. Christ was the expected one.

He introduced the immediate circumstances before the coming of Christ with reference to the work of John the Baptist and his preaching of repentance, a preparatory message for the coming of the Lord. John fulfilled his own work in pointing people to another, even one whose shoes he was not worthy to loose. Then he turned his attention to the second part of his sermon to tell his hearers of this one of whom John spoke, the one who was of David's seed, the one through whom salvation has come.

## **Part 2**

In verses 27-37 Paul sets forth Jesus of Nazareth as the Savior and Christ. Recalling the entire opposition Jesus faced in Jerusalem, he noted it was because they knew Him not, failed to recognize Him as the One of whom the prophets spoke and how the people of Jerusalem, under the guidance and persuasion of their rulers, fulfilled the prophecies uttered years previous concerning the Messiah. He mentioned in irony of the actions of the enemies of Jesus because they did not realize that what they were doing was actually providing additional evidence that Jesus was the very One for whom they should have looked, the very One they denied.

Even though no fault was found in Him, Pilate turned Him over to the wishes of the mob for Him to be put to death. When they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, this having obvious reference to the crucifixion of Christ, Jesus' body was taken down from the cross and buried.

Then we come to a very critical part of Paul's sermon as he preached the resurrection of Christ and how there were many witnesses of the reality of that event.

## **Prophecies Cited**

Having established that truth, he returned to the promise God had made long ago and announced that "*God hath fulfilled the same*" by the resurrection of Christ. He cites three Old Testament passages to provide Scriptural evidence for his contention. One passage he mentions specifically was a portion of the second Psalm, a prophetic psalm, identifying Jesus and the Son of God, begotten of God. Then he affirmed that Jesus was raised to die no more and that through Jesus God's gift was given, calling them the "*sure mercies of David*," mercies from God delivered through the seed of David. Quoting also from Isaiah 55:3, where Isaiah prophesied of the blessings God would give through David, he showed these promises and prophecies were now fulfilled in Christ.

Paul quotes yet a third text (Psalm 15:10), where it was prophesied that God's Holy One would not see corruption, having reference to the fact that though He was killed, He would be raised again (Acts 2:27,31).

These prophetic words referred not to King David, for David had died and was buried and his body saw corruption. He was not the one to be resurrected in fulfillment of God's promise of a Savior. But Christ was raised again, saw no corruption, because He came forth from the tomb the third day, fulfilling the promises and prophecies of God.

It is significant to note here that Paul, in speaking of Jesus as the Son of God and the fulfillment of God's promise, and how He is the resurrected One, used some of the same prophetic passages of the Old Testament that Peter used on Pentecost to prove the very same truth about Jesus. Peter and Paul preached the same message about the same man, Jesus, and proved the same truth and identity regarding Him. This should forever dismiss this modernistic and infidelic foolishness of a "Pauline" versus a "Petrine" gospel. This is one gospel, and these inspired apostles preached it alike.

### **Part 3**

The third part of Paul's sermon includes the inevitable conclusion from the points of history and the prophetic utterances and fulfillment of them. Through this man, Jesus, there is forgiveness of sins. Only through this One is there forgiveness of sins. Here is the message men need so desperately to hear and believe. Christ is the way of forgiveness of sins, and there is no other (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

The condition that must be met by mankind in order to lay hold on this forgiveness is belief in these things, faith in the message regarding Christ. Paul preached justification by faith, just as he had written that same message in Romans 5:1. *"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* It is noteworthy that Paul did neither speak nor write "justification by faith alone." When we study the whole counsel of God we learn the kind of faith that saves, which is a faith that demands and leads to obedience to the commands our Lord gives. Faith that saves includes doing what the Lord says do. How foolish for anyone to say he believes in Christ but manages to turn his mind to think he need not obey what the Lord commands.

He does remind the Jews of a point that doubtless was "sticky" with them and that is that nobody can be justified by the law of Moses.

#### **Part 4**

This portion of the sermon was designed to be persuasive to his hearers of the seriousness of their disposition with this truth concerning Christ. It consists of warnings against unbelief and the failure to do what is required. In verse 40 he mentions to them a warning of which even the prophets had spoke. Please note how "negative" his words are at this point. Let us beware of those who claim to preach as did Paul but who ridiculously contend that all of our preaching be "positive." If we followed their directions we should fail to declare the whole counsel of God. Paul warned with strong words against unbelief. The warning was easily understandable. Unless they did have saving faith, they would perish. What an emphasis on personal responsibility to the gospel of Christ!

This is, in few words, the momentous message that Paul declared to his hearers in Antioch. This is the story of salvation, which embraced what God has done to save man, and what man must do for his own salvation. What is our reaction to this sermon about Christ? In Antioch the Gentiles sought to hear more. The Jews went away, but the next week raised such opposition to this truth that Paul said they had judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life (Acts 13:46). Some believed and obeyed. Others did not. When one does hear, believe, and obey, he enjoys salvation. Until he hears, believes, and obeys he remains lost. Which shall be your response?

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# **God And Personal Responsibility**

In order to get God's Word before us, you are urged to first read the eighteenth chapter of Ezekiel and then return to this study. Without the text, too lengthy to copy here, the thrust of the lesson will likely escape you.

The people of Israel and Judah considered their suffering to be due to the sins of others, not their personal sins. It is true that people often suffer because of the wrongdoing of those around them. But it is not true that people bear the guilt of the sins of those around them, or those who have lived before them. Chapter eighteen gives emphasis to the personal responsibility each person has for what they say and do in life. It is a mistake to blame our sins on society, environment, outside conditions, and other people even though these things may contribute to our weakness. Each one is responsible before God and accountable for his or her conduct.

There was a proverb in the land that said, *"The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."* The idea was that the fathers had sinned and the children were suffering because of their sins. It was true that the consequences of the sins of the previous generation were also being visited upon that generation. This is a matter that is beyond dispute how people can do wrong and bring hurt and harm on others. But the children were not guilty of the sins of their fathers, nor were the fathers guilty of the sins of their children, even though each may well have had some influence and affect upon the other.

Ezekiel was pleading with the people, however, that the time had come when no longer could anyone look to the other and point the finger of blame. *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die,"* verse 20 stressed. Each was responsible for his own sins. Death, which in this instance referred to spiritual separation from God, if not forgiven, which was conditioned upon repentance, would bring an eternal separation.

## **Righteousness Versus Unrighteousness**

Verses 5 through 13 defines righteousness and unrighteousness. If a man be just, he will be doing what is lawful and the things that ought to be done. He will not do some things simply because they are violations of God's law. He will do other things because God has declared them to be right. Righteous people are not those who simply refrain from doing evil. Even a wooden post could be called righteous if that was all that was required. A righteous person will and must be a doer of good. James 4:17 reads, *"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* A righteous man walks in the Lord's statutes, keeps the Lord's ordinances, deals truly with his fellowman, as well as refrains from doing that which God decrees is evil.

The prophet compared fathers and sons while continuing the theme of personal responsibility. First, a good father may have an evil son. The father's goodness does not spare the evil son from the punishment the son deserves. There is the old adage that says, "Every tub must sit on its own bottom." This is not Scripture, but the idea is there when we think of personal responsibility. Paul did write, Galatians 5:6, *"For every man shall bear his own burden."* The father, even though he may suffer because of his son's transgressions, does not bear the guilt of his son's evil.

### **Father And Son**

Verses 14 through 18 speaks of an evil father that begets a good son. It is true that this is a possibility because other influence in the son's life, fortunately, overshadows the evil influence of his father's life and example. Probably many sons have been good people in spite of their father, and because of the good influence of their mother, or someone else. Some sons, seeing the results of a wicked life, choose to walk differently from their fathers. While the son is adversely affected in many ways from having an evil father, the son does not bear the guilt of his father's sins. Again, the theme is the same. Each one is personally responsible.

Verses 19 and 20, especially the first part of 19, explains why this is true. The question is asked, "Why does not the son carry the load of guilt?" Verse 20 responds, "Because of personal responsibility." Righteousness is of value to the righteous. Wickedness is destructive of the wicked.

From verses 21 through 24 we are taught that one can turn

from his evil, and if he chooses, he can turn from his righteousness. How good it is when men realize their transgressions and repent of their sins and are forgiven. How tragic it is when men who have walked in the paths of righteousness fall from going good and pursue the paths of evil. The path of life for the wicked is to turn from his wickedness. The path of death for the righteous is to turn from his path of righteousness. With such teaching how can anyone honestly contend for the false and deceptive doctrine that one is once saved and then cannot be lost? This passage ought to silence that false doctrine once and for all time, but in spite of the Lord's teaching there be those who continue to hold to their denominational dogma and misinform others regarding it.

The Lord takes no pleasure in punishing the wicked. The threats of punishment are designed to turn the wrongdoer from his ways into the manner of life that leads to eternal life. Punishment has the ability, when rightly administered and accepted, to correct and prevent people from going to their destruction. We all realize this is true with regard to the upbringing of our children. The chastening that comes from God is because God loves us (Hebrews 12:6).

### **New Testament Teaching**

Second Corinthians 5:10 also teaches the personal responsibility that Ezekiel was teaching. *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."* Romans 14:12, *"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."* The teaching cannot be avoidable. Each of us stands personally responsible for the way and manner we conduct life.

Verses 25 through 32 mentions how some complained it was not fair that the Lord insisted on this. But the Lord contended that this approach to the matter was the only fair and proper approach. The way of "passing the buck" was unequal and unjust. Verses 26 and 27 repeat the benefit of turning from evil and the tragedy of turning from good. Man is a creature of choice and is capable of charting whatever course in life he decides. But whatever course he follows is that for which he must give answer and take the consequences. Verse 30, *"I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord God."* The certainty of the judgment is as real as

the fairness of personal responsibility.

Cannot we see, as much as one might wish it so, that we cannot be saved for another? Nobody can render obedience to God in stead of another. If this could be done every faithful father and mother would make sure that their children would be saved. Every righteous son or daughter would ascertain the salvation of parents. Every good wife and every Christian husband would do whatever could be done to save their mate. But that matter cannot be escaped; nobody can be saved for another. There are some things in life every person must do for himself or herself. Obeying the gospel in order to be saved is one of them. Obedience nor disobedience can be transferred to somebody else.

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## ***If You Can't Stand Now, How About Later***

*Jeremiah 12:5, "If thou hast run with footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedest, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"*

Jeremiah was one of the more prominent Old Testament prophets. He is called one of the "major" prophets, called by the Lord to be a prophet during the reign of Josiah, king of Judah. Under Josiah there was a great spiritual revival, the most significant effort to return to God in the land of Judah since the days of David some four hundred years earlier. It was during this revival that Jeremiah was called. He was prophet during the reign of the last five kings of Judah.

In his early life Jeremiah seemed to have been a rather tender and retiring person, almost shrinking from public life and prominence. He was much like Saul, the first king of Israel, at the time he was chosen to be king. He was keely sensitive to injustice and very sympathetic toward the sorrows his nation was enduring. Conflict and antagonism appeared to dismay him.

One has commented that at the start of his life's work he was more of a John than a Peter.

But his timidity, tenderness, and reserved disposition changed to a large degree during his life toward a stronger, more courageous fighter, even often harsh in doing the work he was called to do. He was no longer fearful of difficulty and danger. Doubtless this change was forced upon him because of his work as a prophet of God during the days of digression from God. His times, his work, his opponents had challenged and demanded it of him. He could not have survived with any other disposition.

He filled the work of a prophet for nearly fifty years. It was during this period in Judah's history that the nation was taking giant strides toward their self-imposed destruction. Northern Israel had already fallen some eighty years previously.

### **State of Judah**

Following Josiah's reign Judah was governed by four wicked kings in a row. They were kings that were personally corrupt, worshipped idols, and walked not in the ways of Jehovah. The people, having swelled to a revival and renewed devotion under Josiah swiftly plummeted into sin again under these evil leaders. Historically, it seems that even the people of God do not long remain faithful but suffer apostasy.

Jeremiah, along with other prophets, constantly roamed the nation, pleading, preaching, urging, teaching, warning lest the nation be ruined. His love for God, for his fellow countrymen, for the future generations, would not allow him the secluded life his personality would have preferred. His love for truth and his hatred of evil would not permit his tenderness to be a holdback from using the strong words that the situation demanded that he speak. As he stated in Jeremiah 20:9, *"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."*

The times were evil, therefore his way was hard. He was often persecuted by the very ones he sought to help. He knew what it was to be rejected, ridiculed, shunned, and yet he spoke boldly for the Lord. He was even accused of treason for warning what the path of transgression would bring upon the nation of Judah.

### **Background**

Let us read the four verses immediately prior to our text.

Jeremiah 12:1-4, *"Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments: Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? whereon are all they happy that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root: they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit: thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins. But thou, O Lord, knowest me: thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee: pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter. How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? the beasts are consumed, and the birds; because they said, He shall not see our last end."*

Jeremiah seemed disillusioned at the circumstances in Judah. Why do the wicked seem to prosper? That did not seem right. Why do those who act treacherously seem at ease? That ought not be the way of it. Their service to God was only lip-service. God did not really rule their hearts. Why should Jeremiah, and others who sought God's righteousness, have to suffer because of such as these? The righteous seemed to have a more difficult time than the wicked. What future was there for the man who tried to do right? All of these frustrating questions bounded in the heart of Jeremiah.

God's answer was that if you cannot stand these relatively small trials and persecutions, what are you going to do when greater perils and burdens come?

When the Jordan was low, it was easy to cross. If you find it difficult when low, what do you expect when the river reaches floodstage? If troubles, slow as footmen, surpass you, what will you do in a race with horses? If in a land of peace you are not secure, how will you fare when heavier strife overtakes you? These are really soul-searching questions.

### **Evil Prospered, But...**

God did not deny to Jeremiah that the wicked seemed prospered. But what of that? That was not to be the concern of Jeremiah. Jeremiah knew the end of the wicked would be destruction. The joys, pleasures, and rewards of sin were temporary at best. Real prosperity and security was with those who still served God though their present state of affairs was not encouraging.

God had already told Jeremiah what was coming upon Judah. Jeremiah had been warning the people of the impending

doom. It was because all seemed so prosperous that the people gave him no heed. But Jeremiah knew when the final test came the wicked would not and could not stand.

God implies that even though hardship was the present lot of Jeremiah it could and would get worse. His personal life would become more difficult. His heart would be broken as he witnessed his people seized, violated, and humiliated by enemies from without. All his work of teaching and warning would appear to have been in vain and amount to nothing. But if Jeremiah weakened beneath the complacency, apathy, and indifference of his people toward what is right, his strength would not sustain him in the more trying hours that were yet to come.

### **Lessons To Learn**

There is much in this theme that we need to learn and apply to ourselves. Hardships and disappointments are often a part of one's life. Paul wrote, Second Timothy 3:12, "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*" Those who never encounter problems and difficulties never grow stronger like they could. They never develop the confidence that they can face whatever life offers them. If we rightly consider the trials we meet, they can be turned into blessings because they give us opportunity to develop character, get a clear perspective on life, learn what is and is not of real and everlasting value.

If the smaller, insignificant, daily problems cause us to lose our equilibrium, what will we do when real trouble comes? If we fret and despair and allow ourselves to grow bitter over things which are more or less common to all mankind, how do we expect to overcome and defeat stronger forces that would destroy us? When our lives are relatively good, and we have many blessings, with so many conditions and circumstances that are well and we still find no peace, what of the days when poverty, sickness, deprivations or other forms of stress may strike? If we complain during the good days, what will we do during the evil days that come?

We often bother ourselves with many matters. It is a wise habit to often ask ourselves, "Is this thing which concerns me really worth all the bother I am allowing it to give me?" We are possibly inclined to exaggerate our troubles, "making mountains out of molehills." I do not minimize the tremendously heavy burdens that many people have to carry. I speak of those trivial burdens that are not all that important, but we often allow to

“get under our skin.

If we let those smaller things harass us, can we be able to climb the real mountains when we reach them? Probably most of us do not realize how blessed we are. If we could consider most other people of the world, we might be more appreciative of the bountiful outpouring of God's benevolence upon us.

### **Problems Are Commonplace**

Severe ordeals often come in a person's life when they least expect them. We see people with heavy loads and wonder, “How do they take it so calmly, so composed, even in the face of these dreadful, serious, heart-rending trials they are forced to face?” We all think our problems are big ones, but most likely, if we really only knew how small they were in relation to what others endure, we would be strengthened.

The reason some people are able to “take things in stride” that are truly difficult is because they first have learned how to meet the smaller problems of life. They have in their hearts the knowledge of what really matters, and they know that this life is not all that there is to one's existence. There is another life awaiting the faithful in the Lord and for that they long. They know that the fleeting affairs of life, however good or bad, are just exactly that -- fleeting and passing. They have learned that the best life consists of fearing God and keeping His commandments and know this is their whole duty (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

We are not permitted to look into the future. We know not what we may be called upon to face. We cannot tell what a day may bring forth. The future is always uncertain, for the nation, the church here on earth, and for our individual lives. But we do know we have refuge in God. We do know we will not be tempted above that we are able to bear (First Corinthians 10:13). We do know that God has worked for our good in providing the way of eternal life (Romans 8:28). We do know that whatever transpires Almighty God loves us (Romans 8:38,39).

### **We Can Prevail**

Life has its mysteries, injustices, inequalities and bewildering moments. We cannot escape them all. But if we cannot learn to cope with them by leaning on God and following His will, what

shall we do when it comes our time to cross the river of death? Have you ever seriously considered that moment? It awaits you someday, somewhere, sometime, and it is inescapable and inevitable. Our natural courage will not sustain us then when we view the reality of that moment. How much we shall long for the steadying hand of the Lord to hold us, lead us, guide us, lest we sink. But if we have not learned to lean on the Christ before that hour, how shall we meet and successfully pass that milestone?

The prevailing theme of our text and these thoughts derived from it is that we must meet the present with confidence, optimism, assurance, and determination. We must prepare for the future so we need not have fear of it. We must, however, prepare **now** while we have time and opportunity, knowing not when our opportunities shall be abruptly terminated. We are to prepare during life for its end. If we fail in that, we have failed in everything that really matters.

The adequate ability to live correctly both here and with God eternally is found only by being faithful in Christ. You must become a Christian through faith, repentance, confession, and baptism. Then you must be a Christian, loyal and faithful each day until we leave the walks of this life. Doing that, relying on God, we shall know the joy eternal that awaits the redeemed.

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## ***The Rich, Young Ruler***

Because of the length of our text, you are requested to take your New Testament and read Mark 10:17-27 before turning to these comments. Accounts of this episode are also recorded in parallel passages in Matthew 19:16-26 and Luke 18:18-27. There are but a few variances in these accounts, but there are no contradictions. Putting all three records together we have the complete record.

Jesus came into Judea teaching the people. He was confronted by an enthusiastic inquirer that Matthew says is young, that Luke says is a ruler, and that all three writers say was rich. Hence, the identification of the rich, young ruler.

He addresses Jesus as "*Good Master*," and the response Jesus gave has puzzled many. Verse 18, "*Why callest thou me*

*good? there is none good but one, that is, God."* Jesus is not saying He is bad and not good. That would be contrary to everything the inspired biographies of Christ reveal concerning Him. Atheists have leaped upon this statement and misapplied it to contend that Jesus is denying His Deity. The very opposite is true. Jesus is saying in essence, "You call me good and God is good. Do you acknowledge my Deity?" In other words, if the man did not believe that Jesus was Deity, why did he refer to Him in terms that belong to Deity? How could Jesus be good and claim to be Deity if it was not so? This is not a denial of His Deity but an affirmation of it.

### **The Question**

Observe this inquirer more closely. He came running to Jesus which indicates a keen interest and enthusiasm and desire to learn. He was seeking something. He asked one of the most challenging questions one can pose, "*What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?*" He was looking for the right thing and had come to the right One for an answer.

People so often look for the wrong things. Many who are looking for the right things often seek them from the wrong sources. How many times do people look for eternal life but turn to men, creeds, catechisms, manuals, prayer books, feelings, disciplines, everything and anything except the Lord and His all-sufficient Word? This man looked for the most important thing in all of one's existence and he had asked this question at the best time of his life to consider it; namely, while he was young. Solomon had written, "*Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth.*" (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

### **The Answer**

Our Lord's answer was, "*Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honor thy father and mother.*" (Verse 19). There was something he had to do. Eternal life was not unconditional and our Lord has never indicated that it is. He said, "*Keep the commandments.*" This man lived subject to the law God had given Israel through Moses. It would be a mistake for us to think that we can serve God acceptably under that same system today because that system has been nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:12). "*For the law was given by Moses, but*

*grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*" (John 11:17). Repeatedly in the New Testament we learn that God speaks to man through His Son (Hebrews 1:1,2; Matthew 17:5), and men cannot now be saved through the Mosaic law (Romans 3:20,28; Galatians 3:11).

This young man then makes an amazing statement. Verse 20, *"Master, all these have I observed from my youth."* Obviously, this person was a zealous person, who knew the law, respected the law, obeyed the law, having a commendable moral character. Like even some among our youth today, he was far advanced in righteousness considering his youthfulness. His conformity to the law was not faulted, nor did Jesus dispute his claim. Nonetheless Jesus responded, *"One thing thou lackest."*

To respond in such fashion is much like a doctor saying, "You are very healthy except you have cancer. Though there was may have embarked upon a zealous and sincere persuasion that

### **The Barrier**

His problem was one of the heart. Before considering his problem, please notice the attitude of the Christ toward this person. The Scripture says, *"Then Jesus beholding him, loved him..."* Jesus had considerable respect for this man. He knew the hearts of men and He knew this man's problem. Nonetheless He loved him even though He did not approve of him. In spite of the man and his spiritual heart trouble, Jesus sought this man's highest good, which is what love is.

His problem was an attitude toward material things and his possessions. Jesus does not condemn riches per se. But the Scriptures do teach repeatedly that we are stewards and must given an account of our stewardship. When Jesus told him to go and sell what he had and give to the poor, to lay up treasures in heaven, assume his responsibilities as His disciple, the man was overwhelmed with what sacrifice he would have to make. He knew immediately that Christ must come first and there could be no middle ground (Matthew 6:24). The Lord's lesson to him was that He must have first place above all else and anything that prevented that, anything that retarded that, anything that was a barrier to this kind of commitment would be a sufficient hindrance to keep one out of heaven and eternal life. We certainly must learn this vital point of this record.

With this man his wealth was first. Sometimes others put other things first, like prestige, acceptance by the world, popularity,

social standing, education, pleasure, power, even things that are not wrong of themselves but which are allowed to crowd God out, like family, job, leisure. That which can keep us from eternal life need not be something sinister and vile, but need only be allowed to take preeminence over our service to God through Christ. Jesus meant what He taught when He said, Matthew 6:33, *"Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness..."*

### **The Fatal Turn**

Our text says the young man went away sorrowful. It is a tragedy that he went away at all. By doing so he closed the door, the only door that was open to him into heaven for which he longed. It was not that he loved sin and the darkness of it, but he would not sacrifice whatever he had to sacrifice to be a disciple of Christ. He failed in his duty to God and refused to surrender his will to that of the Savior.

It is significant that our Lord did not say anything else to him, but allowed him to leave. In all likelihood, if we had been there and seeing one so close to salvation as to lack only one thing we might have embarked upon a zealous and sincere persuasion that he change his mind. But the Lord knew something that we cannot always know. He knew the man's heart. He knew where his real affections were. He knew this rich, young ruler had made up his mind and our Lord never coerces or forces His will upon anyone. He offers salvation and invites people to come to Him and live. But if people choose to reject His plea, He will allow them to go on their way to their spiritual and eternal destruction. People who come to Christ must come of their own surrender and free-will, voluntary, because they have conviction and know this is what they must do, wanting to do it because God has commanded it. Jesus did not use high pressure tactics or create undue emotionalism. His approach was a calm, sincere, loving, firm manner of giving intelligent information and appealing to people to make a deliberate, rational response. If we come to Christ we must come that way. We must do so because we are compelled, not by over-persuasion and pressure, but from a heart overrunning with conviction and love for our God in heaven.

### **Who Can Be Saved**

This event caused Jesus to make another startling statement. Verse 25, *"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."* There have been many spurious and fanciful explanations offered for these words. But they do not appear to be that complicated. Luke, one of the inspired men who recorded this event in the ministry of Christ, was a physician and he would have been acquainted with a surgical needle. All three writers would have knowledge of needles, as would most today who read their words. Just as it is impossible for the large animal like a camel to pass through the eye of such an instrument, it is impossible for a person to have eternal life when he puts his trust and priority in something other than Christ. Christ went on to say that it was possible for even a rich man to go to heaven, but it was not possible if one put their trust in riches, which was the precise problem this young ruler had. When people will put the Lord and His way first, then salvation is possible.

We look with sadness on the foolish choice of this man. But rather than just recognizing his error, shall we learn from it? Do we allow other things to sometime crowd between us and our service to God through Christ? If you are not a Christian, what is it that stands between you and God like this man's riches stood between him and God? Whatever it is, cannot you see the wisdom of casting it aside, removing it from your path, and coming to the Savior? We plead with every reader to not turn away and continue the pursuit of the same things that have kept you alienated from your Creator that offers to save your soul in heaven. Believing in the Christ, repent, confess, be baptized, and live the way that always puts Christ and His will first with you. What better lesson could we learn from this record than to learn this?

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**If you really did** what everybody thinks you should, even attempt to demand that you do, you probably would not have any time or energy left to do what you should do, let alone do the things you might like to do. People often have no hesitancy to make demands on others to serve their own interests. Who is not aware of those who would impose upon others without regard for anybody but themselves? It pays to be selective as well as available for service. Otherwise, you could get overrun.

## **Good Lessons About Christ**

Jesus said many things about Himself in order that we might understand His nature, His mission, His relationship with the Father as well as His relationship with His disciples. About nine times in the New Testament we read where Jesus used the phrase, "*I am.*" Each time holds a distinct significance.

In the relatively near future I hope to present in this booklet at least two full length sermons dealing with these instances where Jesus said, "*I am.*" But permit me to briefly outline them here.

John 8:56-58 Jesus taught His Deity by telling His hearers that He existed before Abraham. This asserted His eternal nature, a characteristic that pertains only to Deity.

Several times Jesus used the phrase to compare Himself with things well understood in order that people can better understand Him. For instance, in John 6 He called Himself the bread of life. In John 8, 9 and 12 He identified Himself as the light of the world. Twice in John 10 He used the phrase when He said He was the door to the sheepfold and later the good shepherd.

Another familiar statement of Jesus was when He spoke to the sisters of the dead Lazurus and called Himself the resurrection and the life. How many times have we heard His statement about being the way, truth and life in John 14? The next chapter, John 15, we hear Him saying He is the true vine.

When one reads the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman in John 4 the woman said certain things would be revealed when the Messiah came. Jesus then told her He was the Messiah, meaning the Christ, the Anointed One.

From these several statements preachers can preach an entire and very beneficial series of sermons. Probably most who have preached many years have done just that. And well they should. What better way to learn of our Lord than to give heed to the things He said about Himself and how He presented Himself! Surely, when we study such comments we can know with certainty just how He wants us to consider Him

**JWB**



## ***Could I Believe Him?***

It is not uncommon for people to take exception to what a preacher might teach. It is well known that many are teaching error regarding marriage, divorce and remarriage. Preachers do not get overly aroused because some reject the truth even though this is always disappointing. How one objects often tells on a person, however. Consider comments I recently received from one who said he was a preacher.



**JAMES W. BOYD**

He disagreed with me about the right of the guilty party not having the right to remarry. He demanded a debate, assuring me of his gentlemanly way and his love. Yet, he insinuated one is a coward who did not do what he demanded, said those who do not do what he says are not worth the salt in their bread, contended those who differed with him lacked "guts," and so it went. His arrogance and hostility were overshadowed only by his egotism. I wondered if I could believe his assurances, and if he wrote a letter of introduction with such venom, how much would he stay on the subject in any discussion on anything. Experience teaches one the difference between being firm and forceful and just being mean and snappy. I feel sorry for him, don't you?

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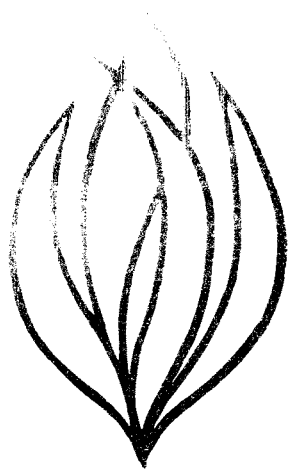
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# **A Burning Fire**



“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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***John William Boyd*      *Back Cover***



# **Jesus**

## **And The Little Children**

Mark 10:13-16, *“And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.”*

Every reader of the biographies of Christ have noted the love and compassion Jesus had and demonstrated toward little children. It is obvious from this passage His exceptional interest in them. People were showing their respect for Jesus by bringing their children to Him for Him to bless and even to touch. Jesus has also shown great interest in children by teaching their parents to properly train them in the ways of God, love them, protect and provide for them. We do well to teach our children that “Jesus loves the little children of the world,” and to teach them to love Jesus in return.

### **A Comparison**

But while we can admire the beautiful sentiment of the love of Jesus for children, we do not want to overlook the fact that children were more to Jesus than gentle, adorable creatures to be loved and protected. In this passage, they were His chief parable and comparison with those who make up the kingdom of God. *“Of such”* is the kingdom of God. The American Standard Version says, *“for to such belongeth the kingdom,”* and that people are *“to be as [like, JWB] a little child.”* According to Jesus, a well conditioned child illustrates better than anything else the distinctive features of Christian character that should belong to those in the kingdom.

Unfortunately, many well-meaning religious people have misused this passage to teach that children are lost and have tried to justify “infant baptism.” They abuse parallel passages in Matthew 18:3; 19:13; Luke 18:15. There is nothing remotely found in these passages to teach that children are lost or the practice of “infant baptism.” Baptism is for those who have sinned, and who can hear the Word of God, believe it, repent of their sins and confess their faith in Christ as the Son of God. To

baptize an infant implies that the infant is lost. But the truth of the matter is that Jesus used the child to illustrate the nature of the saved.

If a child is born totally depraved, doomed and damned as some teach, why would Christ desire that those in the kingdom be like them? If a child is lost, why should we want to be as they are? What benefit is it for a lost person to be as a lost person?

### **Not “Infant Baptism”**

Furthermore, those who practice “infant baptism” do not baptize, but sprinkle water upon a child, without his consent or understanding. There is a difference between baptism and sprinkling. Baptism is an immersion, a burial, plunging beneath. Sprinkling is one of man’s substitute measures to replace and displace what God has commanded. “Infant baptism” is not of divine origin but comes from the doctrines of men, and is an offshoot of the Calvinistic doctrine that a child is born in sin, guilty of inherited guilt of sin, totally depraved and doomed. Jesus teaches that this is not true by saying the kingdom of heaven is like children.

According to Roman Catholic history and theology, where “infant baptism” originated, it was not practiced for nearly three hundred years after the Lord’s church was established on Pentecost in Jerusalem after the resurrection of Christ. The apostles, through whom the will of God through Christ was revealed, had been dead nearly a century before that practice was utilized.

### **Safe**

Children are not saved because they never have been lost. To be lost one must have sinned. Sin is a transgression of God’s law (First John 3:4). The child has violated no divine law. The child is safe until he reaches an age of understanding capacity and becomes accountable before God for his actions. Until then they are innocent and guiltless.

The confusion that exists among denominationalists regarding “infant baptism” is seen in the fact that some teach infants are “baptized” because they are sinful while others teach we should “baptize” infants because they are saved. Some Protestant churches have rewritten their disciplines that have first said one thing then say just the opposite. There is no Biblical authority for

such doctrines and practices.

Jesus points to children as an example like He pointed to the lily of the field, to sheep, the mustard seed, leaven and other things. He said the kingdom is *"like"* these things. They possess similar characteristics. The word *"suffer"* or permit was His reply to His disciples who rebuked those who were bringing their children to Him to bless them, love them, and pray over them. The presence of these examples of the character of those in the kingdom did not disturb or frustrate our Lord. He is most concerned that parents bring their children to Him. But this is not done by some kind of religious rite and man-made ceremony, but by teaching them His truth that the child may learn to walk after Christ. They are brought to Christ by parents teaching them and bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

### **Childlike**

What are some of the characteristics of children possessed by those in the kingdom? First, the child was born, entering a new life. So it is with the redeemed. They have been regenerated, *"born again."* *"Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."* (John 3:3). The old ways of sin are put to death (Ephesians 4:22-24). Citizens in God's kingdom take on a new manner of life, new goals, new loyalties. As the child is born into his physical family, those in the kingdom are born into God's spiritual family.

The child is one of confidence, faith, unwavering trust rather than suspicion and scepticism. A child will generally believe whatever those in whom he places confidence will tell him, without questioning. The readiness to accept whatever God says is the attitude of a Christian that is childlike. He takes God's Word without doubt. God said, and that settles it; he believes it. What he can understand, he studies to understand. What he cannot understand, he accepts anyway because God has spoken.

The child is unconscious of pride, self-righteousness and self-sufficiency. Therefore, the child is teachable and can be led. A true Christian will be humble and teachable also. He will allow himself to be guided by God's Word, led by the Spirit through the Word. He recognizes his inability to live successfully standing alone, and is content to keep hold of the hand of the Savior, His Shepherd, as he goes through life step by step. A Christians'

dependence on the Lord is comparable to the dependence a child has on his parents, often carried, often led, not thinking himself capable of charting his own course without guidance.

First Corinthians 14:20, "*Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.*" There is a difference between being childish and childlike. Paul admonishes the Christian to be mature in understanding. This is an exhortation to spiritual growth. But in such things as malice, be like children.

How are children when it comes to malice? They so quickly lay aside guile, hypocrisy and envy. They are quick to forget injury and hurt feelings. Children playing together can have a falling out that seems so serious but before you can turn around are happily playing together again. They do not carry grudges or harbor animosity in their hearts, even toward those who may offend them from time to time. Grudge holding seems to be beyond their capacity. How fine it would be if more adults could develop this childlike quality!

### **An Essential**

The importance of being like children cannot be overemphasized. Jesus said, Matthew 18:3, "*Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*" We see how Jesus made a childlike disposition an essential in being saved. How does one overemphasize the importance of salvation?

Often we might consider growth and reaching maturity as going from childish ways toward the ways of an adult. But in some respects, real maturity is going from the evil ways often found in adult behavior back to the wholesome and admirable qualities of a child.

Let us not miss the divine message of Christ. Mark 10:14,15, "*But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily, I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.*"

Once there was a small boy who could play the piano rather well for his age. He was asked by one of his school teachers to play in the school assembly one morning. She said, "Can you play a song for us this morning?" He responded, "I can, but I won't."

## **Some This Way**

Do you realize that this is the way some people are acting toward obeying the gospel. This little boy was not demonstrating an attitude that we ought to have toward the invitation of Christ. Many "can" be saved, but the "won't" because they refuse to obey.

We plead that no reader of these words will reject the salvation God offers because they are too set in their own ways to follow Him. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and will repent of your sins, then confess that faith and obey Him in baptism for the remission of sins, and God will add you to His church, which is the body and company of the redeemed.

† † † † †

## **Where Our Trust Must Be**

This lesson is based upon an event that took place during the life of Christ on earth immediately following the discussion of the rich, young ruler. Jesus had just told the young man to forsake whatever it was that stood between him and God, even his riches, which was that which he put first. The young man went away from Jesus sorrowful because it meant he must place his confidence in something other than his wealth. This event gave rise to another teaching by Jesus concerning where our trust must be.

Mark 10:23-27, *"And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! And the disciples were astonished at his words. But Jesus answereth again, and saith unto them, Children, how hard it is for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! 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. And they were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, Who then can be saved? And Jesus looking upon them saith, With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible."*

## **Amazed**

Notice the amazement of the disciples at the words of Jesus. Men are always amazed and astonished when taken out of their own little groove and have their world and vision enlarged. Many today, like then, are amazed to hear what Jesus advocated, what He stood for, what He proclaimed. Some are so shocked that they stagger in disbelief. This is because of their own finiteness and lack of knowledge and understanding. They are settled into their "ruts" and prejudices, traditions and pre-conceived notions, and when truth comes to them that varies from those things they are amazed. The doctrine of Jesus Christ is so simple, yet so profound, wonderful, workable, that many who hear it for the first time are amazed. Like some who once were sent to seize Jesus, they come away saying, "*Never man spake like this man.*"

The primary theme of the teaching of Jesus here is one of trust. He first said it was difficult for those with riches to enter the kingdom. While they gave the appearance of well being, it was not so with them spiritually. Seeing the surprise of the disciples, Jesus enlarged His explanation and showed that He meant those who placed their trust in riches, like the young man who had just gone away sorrowful. One cannot trust in riches and have love for those things that are deserving of first place.

## **Misapplication**

The message of Jesus has too often been limited in its application. This limitation has produced misunderstanding. Jesus is not casting an evil reflection on material things just because they are material. This is not His teaching. Rather He shows that trust in worldly wealth, as if that meant security for the soul, was altogether incorrect. Was not that the grave mistake of the man in Luke 12? In that passage Jesus said, "*Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*"

Paul wrote in First Timothy 6:17-19, "*Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to*

*come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."*

Earlier in that same chapter he wrote, *"But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."*

Jesus does not speak against riches, but teaches concerning our attitude toward the things that we have been given as a steward in this life. He shows the folly of placing so much concern on the material and how our emphasis should be on the things of the spirit.

### **Poor And Rich**

Another mistaken notion some have developed from this passage is that Jesus' teaching is only to rich people. Who is a rich man? Wealth is not an absolute, but a relative matter. To some people any one of us might be called rich. There are others that we might consider rich who do not consider themselves wealthy at all. Who is rich?

People like to apply this teaching to those who have more of this world's goods than they have, but exclude themselves. One can sin in trusting in little just as much as trusting in much. Love for fifty dollars is as evil as love for a thousand. The size of the purse does not determine what is right or wrong, but the attitude of the heart.

### **Wide Application**

Furthermore, why should we limit the thrust of this teaching regarding trust to just material wealth? The sayings of Jesus are broader than that. We are not to place the welfare of our soul on anything else such as intellectual power and attainment. Many, having some arbitrarily determined academic degree, have assumed that they are "somewhat" and think all is well because they have that degree. It has been my experience over many years that more and more people who clamor for degrees (and I speak especially of the religious degrees), have less wholesome soundness than the average member of the church. Their learning may have gone to their head, but not in the way they think.

One should not rely on his social position in the community.

What a tragedy that so many in the church are stampeded into seeking approval by the community more than remaining loyal to *"thus saith the Lord."*

Many might think because they are physically exceptional that this automatically transfers into spiritual acceptability before God. That is a mistaken idea.

Possibly the most mistaken notion of all concerning this teaching is that it applies to somebody, but not me! These words are for each one of us. They are divine words that condemn placing trust where we ought not. They are not words that place a premium either on wealth or poverty but are concerned with what we place first in life.

While the application of the teaching is properly expanded to include more than wealth, we do want to underscore the danger of wealth. The more one has the more danger there is in placing his confidence there. Jesus is not advising poverty, for then you may become guilty of burying your talents that could be used for good. But because having wealth often brings a temporary satisfaction and contentment, and because it can deceive a person into thinking all is well (like the Laodecians), we have to be alert to its dangers. Luke 12:19-21, *"And I will say to my soul, Soul thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."*

### **The Question**

Realizing from the words of Jesus that wealth cannot save, the disciples ask a question, *"Who then can be saved?"* Jesus had not taught that it was impossible for a rich man to be saved. Some of His followers and early Christians had possessions. Many of them sold fields and gave to the apostles, but while it was in their power they could do what they wished and would not have sinned. We read in the Old Testament, particularly, of wealthy men who faithfully served God even as they were wealthy, such as Abraham, Jacob, Job, David, and others. Jesus did show that it was difficult for rich men to go to heaven because they are the most likely ones to put trust in riches. Poor men, not having riches, are not as likely to trust in what they do not have anyway. He had taught that material prosperity could well bring spiritual poverty.

He illustrates His teaching with a camel and a needle's eye. It is impossible for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, just as it is impossible for a rich man, trusting his riches, to go to heaven. But if the rich man placed his trust in God, with God it was possible for him to be saved. Jesus makes it plain where a person's trust must be. Each person should say, as written on our coins, "In God we trust." This is what Jesus is saying is an absolute necessity for salvation.

One who expects to go to heaven must have the kind of confidence, trust, and faith in God that Paul expressed. Philippians 4:13, "*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*" We can be abased and abound; we can be hungry or filled; we can be at ease or suffer; we can go to heaven, but only by the strength of God. In Him must I place my trust.

### **A Gift**

Salvation is a gift of God (Romans 6:23). Peter told those on Pentecost, "*Save yourselves from this crooked generation.*" He did not say, "Save yourselves by yourselves," for that is impossible. But there are those things that each one must do in order to receive the gift that God gives. Obedience is an essential part in God's plan for saving man.

Obedience is not just going through rituals without understanding, sincerity, and commitment. It is doing what God says, the way God says do it, for the reasons God says do it.

The probing question confronting me and you is, "*Where is our trust?*" We can know where our trust must be. The only way that we can prove we trust God is by doing His will. We are the servants of what and who we obey (Romans 6:16). How can one say, "I love God," but refuse to obey Him? (John 14:15; Luke 6:46). By our refusal to obey we are saying to the Almighty, "I do not believe you; I will not obey you: what you have done is useless; and I will be no worse off by refusing." You may not intend to be saying that, because putting in those words makes it sound so rebellious. But why is this not the way it really is?

Ask yourself, "Where is my trust?" When we have our trust where it ought to be, we will hasten to do what we ought to do.

† † † † †

# **Joseph**

## **Who Saved His People**

Genesis 45:4-13, *"And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph, your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and the lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: and thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast: and there will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty. And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you. And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither."*

Beginning with chapter thirty-seven of Genesis, the story of Joseph and his brethren is told. At the time of our text Joseph is ruler in Egypt, second in power only to Pharaoh. To learn the lessons of these events we need to consider three questions to set the stage: (1) Why was Joseph, a Hebrew, in Egypt? (2) How did this Hebrew rise to such great power in Egypt? (3) What is the explanation for the way Joseph acted toward his brothers when they first came to Egypt, and the way he later treated them?

### **Why In Egypt?**

The reason Joseph was in Egypt is because he had been sold

as a slave by his brothers to Midianite merchants going to Egypt. Jacob had sent Joseph into the fields to inquire of the welfare of the older brothers. When they saw him they were provoked to slay him, but later decided upon this lesser plan of selling him.

All the fault for the enmity between Joseph and his brothers did not rest with the brothers, though they were also responsible. Jacob, the father, contributed to it by showing partiality toward Joseph as his favorite son, being born of Rachel whom he loved more than others. He provided Joseph a coat of many colors and did not demand of him the labor he expected from Joseph's brothers. All of this provoked jealousy and envy against Joseph.

Joseph had also provoked his brothers by bragging, boastfully, of his superiority over them which he determined through dreams he had showing them and even their father bowing before him. As is often the case in many disputes, fault was found in more than one place.

### **From Place To Place**

Once in Egypt, Joseph was sold to an officer of Pharaoh named Potiphar, where Joseph rose to be a most trusted servant and head over his house. But due to false accusations against him by Potiphar's wife, Joseph was later cast into prison.

But, as the saying goes, "You can't keep a good man down." Joseph soon rose to be head over all the prisoners. It was while in prison that he interpreted dreams for Pharaoh's butler and baker who had been cast there. His interpretations came true, the baker being hanged and the butler restored to service before Pharaoh. Later, when Pharaoh had dreams and none could discern them, Joseph was called, gave their meaning which foretold seven years of plenty to be followed by seven years of famine. Joseph was placed head over all Egypt to preserve the crops of the good years to provide for the lean years. He was a wise counselor and confidential friend of the Pharaoh. This explains his presense and position in Egypt.

The predicted famine spread unto Canaan where Jacob and his other sons lived. These sons were sent into Egypt to buy grain and were brought before Joseph. Not recognizing him, nonetheless Joseph readily knew them. Joseph had been sold as a slave when only seventeen. He was about thirty when brought before Pharaoh, the seven years of plenty had passed and two of the famine years had gone by, so Joseph was now

about thirty-nine years old. It is easy to understand why his brothers did not recognize him. Furthermore, they would never have expected to see their brother in such a prominent position in Egypt.

### **With His Brothers**

Joseph did not reveal himself to his brothers right away. He may have wondered why Jacob never came looking for him. He later learned that Jacob had been led to believe he had been killed by a beast. The last time he saw his brothers they hated him, were cruel, harsh, mercenary. Joseph put them through several tests to see if there had been any change in their character during the past twenty-two years. What he learned pleased him because once they were willing to sell their brother, but now they were willing to give their lives for another brother, Benjamin. There had been an enormous change for the better among them all. This being true, then Joseph revealed himself to them as the brother they had sold years ago.

The brothers were fearful that Joseph might take revenge. They wondered what Joseph would do with them. He certainly had the power to do whatever he chose. But Joseph called them near, as our text tells us, and explained all the things that had happened in a very different light than what the brothers might have expected. In his explanation we learn at least three very important spiritual truths.

### **Providence**

First, we see the providence of God at work (verses 7,8). Joseph could see God's hand in all that had occurred. God had been with him in Potiphar's house, in prison, before Pharaoh, all for the purpose of making provision for the family of Jacob, the descendant of Abraham and Isaac through whom God's great promises would be fulfilled as the father of the nation of Israel.

Joseph had undergone quite a change himself from the boastful boy of seventeen. He could have bragged before them how "I told you so" and that he had pulled himself up even from adversity. But he did not do this. He gave full credit to God and God's care. We learn that God could and did use this holy man.

In the providence of God we also see how God could and did use evil men and their wicked ways to accomplish His purposes. This does not mean that the end justifies the means, that the

wicked are not guilty of their sins, but God can use what men decide to do to bring about His will. How many times did God use wicked nations to bring His people, Israel, into hardship, to humble them, and cause them to repent and return to God! God used those Jews and Gentiles of the first century to bring the death of Christ to reality, and by that death salvation can be offered for all mankind.

In God's providence we see how the "natural affairs" of life can be overruled by the Lord. There was nothing miraculous in this, except the ability of Joseph to interpret dreams. Nothing miraculous took place when Esther was used by the Lord to preserve Israel from extermination at the designs of Haman and the Persians. But as Mordecai told Esther. *"Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"* (Esther 4:14). We do not and cannot always know how God may be overruling in the affairs of men and nations. Our prime concern should be that we will allow God to use us by our choice to follow His Word faithfully and thereby be ready for service to Him whatever and whenever opportunity affords.

### **Forgiveness**

Second, we must admire the forgiving spirit of Joseph. He had been subjected to violence, injustice, ingratitude, and disadvantage over and over again. He had opportunity for some revenge. All he had to do was to give the order. But he was merciful and kind. Having given his brothers opportunity to show their penitence, he favored them in every way, not holding them accountable for all that had happened, but forgave them of their evil against him and offered a genuine benevolent attitude and action toward all.

Someone has suggested that in all this Joseph is one of the most Christ-like characters of the Old Testament. He did as God has done toward us and as He would have us do toward those that sin against us. God seeks not revenge against the sinner, but that the sinner come the way of forgiveness and be blessed. Jesus was willing to forgive those who sinned against Him (Luke 23:34). This is what we are taught to do. Ephesians 4:32, *"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."*

### **Character**

Third, we must note the value of maintaining a righteous character, even in times of adversity, or possibly we should say, especially in times of adversity. Joseph lived under severe conditions, temptations to sin, trying circumstances that would test his faith and loyalty to God. But he had a determination to do right. He, like Daniel, purposed in his heart not to defile himself. Regardless of what came his way or his lot in life, he was committed to remain faithful to the God of heaven and earth.

We learn that we ought never sacrifice a Christian and godly character to succeed, or be popular, or even to be relieved of suffering. If we feel we must sacrifice the righteous character to succeed, then we may be trying to succeed in the wrong things. If we think we must compromise truth and virtue to be accepted by others, then we are trying to be accepted by the wrong people. It was Joseph's resolve to live properly before God, in purity of life and strength of character, come what may! We learn that nothing in this life is of sufficient value to alienate ourselves from God or to stoop beneath the Christlike level.

Paul teaches that such accounts are written for our learning (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 10:11). May we be so wise and submissive as to learn and apply these spiritual truths into our own lives.

† † † † †

### **The Meeting Was Cancelled**

Two years ago I preached in a good gospel meeting at the Port St. Lucie church in Florida. It was well attended; lessons were well received; I was invited to come again this year. One lesson was on marriage divorce and remarriage. I do not recall one negative comment regarding the truth I taught.

Earlier this summer I received instructions not to consider the subject again. Thinking they stood for truth I had not planned to do so. But I was told such a lesson would be harmful to innocent Christians. It had not been so considered previously, but now false doctrines had been accepted among them and they wanted to hear the truth about it no more.

Nobody ties my hands like that. Would those of the first century agree to withhold truth? While they will allow a "false  
(continued page 24)

# **A Good Investment**

Mark 10:28-31, *"And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, and children, and lands, for my sake and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. But many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first."*

First, let us learn the meaning of the last verse of the passage. This same phrase is found in Matthew 20:16 and Luke 13:30.

In Matthew it teaches that those who enter the service of God late in life can also receive the reward from the Father. This is not taught to encourage procrastination and postponement of obedience. No one should want to serve the devil one hour longer than he can abandon him. It is designed to give hope to people of every age in life.

In Luke we learn that Gentiles, as well as Jews, indeed, people of every race and nation, regardless of when the truth was first opened unto them, can equally benefit from God's blessings.

The phrase seems to climax yet another thought in Mark. The background of the passage is helpful in coming to its understanding.

## **Timeless Warning**

The apostles had witnessed a discussion between Jesus and the rich man. They had heard Jesus' teaching and giving warning against placing trust in that which perishes with the using. They make application of His teaching to themselves. In this they show great wisdom. Too many are anxious to apply gospel truth to somebody else rather than themselves. But the gospel is to the individual and should be so applied.

Peter speaks, *"Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee."* Matthew's parallel account of this teaching adds that Peter asked, *"What shall we have therefore?"* This may at first appear to have been a self-righteous and boastful statement by comparing themselves with the young man who went away sorrowful from Jesus because he obviously loved his wealth

more than the Lord. But we rather think Peter was simply speaking the truth and that he and the others were prompted by some concern over what their sacrifice would bring them in return. When people make investments they generally want to have some idea what to expect from them.

The context of the answer Jesus gave implies that they either were considering what forsaking all else would profit, or they had already left all and now were wondering if they had made the right decision. "Lord, we have left all, What will be the end of us. What can we expect from all of this? Have we made a good investment or not?"

### **We Must Choose**

Peter's statement brings to the surface a powerful truth. Man must make choice if he is to follow the Christ. We may forsake all and follow Christ, or we may refuse to forsake all and decline to follow Him. But if we follow Him, we must forsake all. Not until we forsake all can we completely serve Him. Where the following goes, the forsaking must go. They are inseparable. It is strange, in light of this teaching, that people can conceive in their minds that they can follow Christ, who gave His all, even Himself, and still remain unwilling to forsake all else to serve Him.

We must understand in what sense the apostles forsook all and how we are to forsake all else. In many ways the early disciples did not forsake all, yet, they said they had forsaken all and Christ did not refute or deny their affirmation. Evidently they had forsaken all to the degree and manner that the Lord expects.

We are not to take the words in an absolute sense because that would bring upon us total chaos, confusion, poverty, and self-imposed death. It would demand we leave off food, shelter, clothing, all associations with all people, civilization, even the necessities of life. The Lord knows we have need of these things and has promised to provide them. Surely, this is not the forsaking that is under consideration.

There is no reason to think the early disciples forsook all family connections or got rid of all their possessions. In fact, we know they did not. Christ does not demand opposites; that is, He does not call for a person to abandon his family when faithfulness does not demand it. This would violate his duties as a father and provider of his own. Neither does He demand

leaving all possessions because He teaches us to be good stewards of what we have. To abandon everything would make us dependent on the unbelieving world for our daily bread, rather than working as God would have us work.

### **What To Leave**

But there are some things that must be abandoned. Paul had to leave so many things in order to be what he was. He had power, fame, wealth, prestige, glory, influence, even above those his own age among the Jews. But he said, *"Yea, doubtless I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ."* (Philippians 3:8).

Peter forsook all, but he led about a wife (Second Corinthians 9:5). He also remained in the association with his fleshly brother, Andrew.

Are we to think that John forsook Mary after Jesus gave him charge to care for her. John also remained in the company of James until James was dead.

John Mark's mother owned a house (Acts 12:12), and Philip had a family with him (Acts 21:8). Yet, it is written that they all must forsake all, follow Jesus, and we are expected to follow their example. The truth of the matter is that they sacrificed whatever was needful to be sacrificed, regardless of how costly it was to them to do so.

### **Two Attitudes**

We must take notice of the difference between two attitudes. One attitude might be called the "give up something" attitude; and the other is the "give up all" attitude. Many people are willing to give up something but fewer are willing to give up all, putting God first before everything. The Pharisees gave a tithe and the rich gave of their abundance. But the poor widow gave of all her living, all she had. Some are willing to give up to a point, but are not willing to always put the interest of the Lord first. The giving up all spirit is like being that *"living sacrifice"* of which Paul writes in Romans 12:1,2. A sacrifice is that which is wholly given; regardless of what it takes, even everything, if necessary. But it is not necessary to literally and absolutely give up everything in order to follow Christ and for it to be justly said

we have forsaken all.

Notice what Jesus mentions as being given up; house, land, children, wife, brothers, sisters, parents. What in the affairs of our daily lives is nearer and dearer to anyone than these? Can anyone put a price on their own kin, his home, his own flesh and blood? Certainly not. But the insistence of the theme is that even these things must be given up, if necessary to follow Christ. There is no limit to what can and must be sacrificed in order to serve God and be saved. It demands giving up anything, everything, if necessary.

It was not uncommon then, or now, for people to be forced to sever even the closest ties in life to serve God faithfully. But it is clear that Jesus is not speaking literally because the rewards he mentions show that there shall be adequate compensation for whatever is giving up. But we know we cannot have other mothers and fathers, even if we could acquire other lands, houses, children, or wives. Jesus is using that which is most precious to show how much we must be determined to put Him first. As He taught in the Sermon on the Mount, "*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...*" (Matthew 6:33), so He is teaching essentially the same here.

### **Forsake All**

Forsaking all to follow Christ is not without its reward. Far more is gained than is given up. The Lord says we shall receive a hundredfold more in gain than that which is invested. By any standard, such a return on an investment is unbelievable. In one sense, the Lord calls for sacrifice but does not let you sacrifice because you are rewarded far more than you can sacrifice.

Again, we must insist Jesus is not teaching that if we give up a house we shall receive literally a hundred houses; or if we give up a wife we shall have a hundred wives; or if we give up a mother we shall have a hundred mothers. Such a misinterpretation is ridiculous. But what can we forsake that is of equal value to the forgiveness of sins and entrance into heaven? What is peace of conscience worth? What is divine support in time of trial worth? How can you put a price on standing in favor with God? These blessings are ours now as we follow Christ, and what is more, eternal life awaits us. Who can say we could give up enough to equal the value of all these?

### **First And Last**

Now we are in a better position to see the meaning of the phrase, "*The first shall be last and the last first*," as found in Mark 10:31. Ordinarily we might expect the first shall be first and the last shall be last. But those with fame, fortune, family, may be considered first in this life, but ranked last in the judgment if such things kept them from following Christ. Those who might have been considered inferior and unfortunate in this life may be the very ones who rank first with God in the judgment if they have given up such things in order to follow Christ. The way the world may rank an individual is not necessarily the way God ranks them. Those who put God first, even at the loss of being first here and now, shall be counted first with God, and that is where being first really matters.

This teaching is very persuasive and should lead us to commit ourselves to the service of God through Christ. It is not a question of how much are you willing to give up to serve God? The question is "Are you willing to put all else after God, giving Him first place in everything?" Some are not willing to give up anything. Others may be willing to give up something. But God commands that we give up all. But what a good investment it is, seeing the bountiful rewards both here and in the after life that awaits those who follow Christ! Let us so think and live that we shall sing in truth that beautiful hymn, "All To Jesus I Surrender."

† † † † †

## ***Trying Times For Our People***

There are times that try the souls of men. We live in such a time. There is reason for grave concern regarding the future of our land and the freedoms afforded its citizens. While we do not suggest that there is any infallible system of human government, we are persuaded that our system has allowed the freedoms that make possible the dignity of man more than any other. As Churchill is reported to have said that democracy was not a perfect form of government but was better than anything else.

We live in an age when mankind can literally destroy all of civilization in a few moments. As one has said, "All men can be cremated equally."

Christians should be disturbed over the dark clouds on the religious scene. History shows such has always existed, but the magnitude of problems sometimes seems overwhelming. We shall not allow ourselves to become frantic and despondent, however, because even though we know not what the future holds, we know Who holds the future. Our concern is not so much for ourselves as for the generations that follow us. We preach the word of God as the solution to man's ills, yet too many are neither aware or concerned about these ills let alone the solution to them. Being overly pessimistic is not the position to take, but a better grasp of realism is in order.

Internationally our nation has declined in recent decades. Having lost prestige among nations, both friend and foe debase our name and trample and burn our flag. We have been embarrassed in many quarters of the world. The pulpit is not the forum for economic, military, and political disputes but we cite this decline as evidence that we have cause for concern. Throughout my lifetime there have been secret and diabolical commitments and agreements made by those in power of which the nation has been kept ignorant that has proved to be our undoing. More than once the goals and aspirations of the nation have been subverted at the conference tables to the extent that our influence for good has been seriously curtailed.

### **Gains By Enemies**

The hard, cold fact is that atheistic communism has made sweeping gains in our world while we have been in retreat. Even the religions of violence and tyranny have forced America into spending itself into near bankruptcy simply for self-protection. Our enemies can and do start trouble anywhere in the world they see fit and we are forced to expend our resources to contain it lest it grow into a wildfire that incinerates us. The struggle between tyranny and freedom continues and many who want freedom flirt and give support to enemies of freedom. Communists boast they shall bury us without an all out war.

America, once a loved nation, and still a nation where millions would come if they could, has spent billions upon billions feeding hungry people, rehabilitating war torn nations, even our enemies. With a compassion and sympathy for the less

fortunate, America has done more than any nation in history to provide for others. Of course, this has been to our advantage as well as those in need. But in spite of this unprecedented aid and relief, even those who have been aided often remain our enemies.

We are accused of pride, arrogance, throwing our weight around, and doubtless, in many instances, this has been a fault. But the response to our assistance has as often been a rebuke for not doing more than even a feeble "thank you" for what is done. This climate among nations should be a cause for concern to every free American, especially Christians.

What may be a symptom of our gross unawareness is the attitude that we, among all nations of history, cannot and shall not fall. We pray that such may be the case, but where do we have the assurance that we shall not reap the whirlwind of the internal decay that has grown to epidemic proportions in our nation? What has happened to other civilizations and nations can happen to us when we run the same course.

### **Moral Decline**

The moral decline in America is too well-documented for debate. What many have called an expanse of liberty has been nothing more than the excess of license. The moral fiber is the strength of our nation, yet, from the highest positions to the man in the street we see moral degeneracy. Some call college cheating, television scandal, exploitation, dishonesty, riots, just normal factors of national life. Well they might be. But let us not be naive and gullible and think that such does not extract its cost in time. The glamorization of evil and the suppression of righteousness is not the path to security of our nation. We still believe that *"righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."* This breakdown of moral fiber causes the Christian his deepest concerns for the oncoming generations. The very quality that has made our nation great has suffered tremendous erosion, and we are blind fools to ignore it. How long can a society pursue the road of selfishness, greed, pleasure, sin, indulgence, repudiation of what is decent, moral, and true and survive? With the lack of respect for authority, the parasite complex that others owe me, vicious crimes, delinquency of adults and juveniles, divorce, propagation of atheism and the loss of respect for the dignity of human life as seen by abortion, we have serious problems confronting us. Isaiah 5:20, "Woe

*unto them that call evil good and good evil; that put darkness for light and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.*" It seems that many in America have turned things around just as Isaiah said. With a heart filled with materialistic ambitions, more concerned for power, money, and prestige than honor, truth, and loyalty to God, we have reason to believe these are trying times for the people of God.

## **Sin Abounds**

There must be a return to discipline, self-discipline, which is a mark of genuine maturity. Work, self-control, sacrifice are virtues that many have buried and have tried to replace them with a "sexual revolution." The widespread sexual immorality in America is shocking even to nations who do not know or care for the true and living God. Pornography, not just what is called hard-core, is in evidence on television, in literature, and tragically, in the lives of millions. The continued bombardment to make socially acceptable homosexuality, lesbianism, divorce, abortion, gambling, drunkenness, fornication, are signs of our times, and they are creating trying times for the people of God.

While the way of Jesus Christ is the way of hope and solution, the forces that profess to follow Christ are so hopelessly divided that so often there is impotency and incapacity to have much influence. Even among brethren who profess to follow the New Testament revelation there is squabbling over opinions and hobbies alongside innovations that imitate the unauthorized denominational world. There have been "spiritual pygmies" in every generation, but many brethren are like parents who are awakened by the house on fire, and who argue over what clothing will be appropriate to wear while the fire endangers their children. Division is devastating to the cause of Christ and Jesus knew it and prayed for unity (John 17: 20-21). God's wrath is directed toward those who would forever be snipping at the heels of the faithful, demanding their human legalism, or arrogantly forcing their departures from the truth. With hundreds of divisions in the religious world, and the world on the brink of becoming a burning ball that would destroy mankind, with souls wallowing in the mire of sin and hell's gates forced wide to embrace the condemned, why, or why cannot those who say they love the will of God cease the injection of their human doctrines, with which they are obsessed, and abandon their schemes and projects that they think are better than truth, and

return to the work of saving souls rather than making loud noises of confusion!

### **A Dark Picture**

You might complain at this point that I have been painting a dark picture. But this I deny. I am trying to unveil the dark picture that the sins of our nation have already painted and to which we need to assign our attention. I suppose, in typical American style, I should turn just here and simply wave the hand and say, "Everything is going to be all right." I truly believe things could be much better and that there is hope for the land of my foreparents and descendants. But it will not be accomplished by pretending all is well, and there is peace, when such is not reality.

### **Christ Is The Way**

Our hope rests in training our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Our hope resides in the national return to morality, individual responsibility, integrity, and a separation from materialism and godlessness. The only antidote to that which inevitably will destroy America is to re-emphasize that which has made America the great nation it has been; namely, a spiritual and moral awakening and conformity to the standards of Almighty God. Do you know any other cure? To whom can we turn except to the way of God? Only solid convictions and faithfulness to them can provide the anchor for the nation lest it continue to drift, and sometimes, run, toward its own collapse. If I was not convinced of this, I would not be spending my life and energies working to that end. I know this is right because such is the warning and message of God to all men everywhere. There is the awesome need of people who will "*stand in the gap*" and live in such fashion that they can be counted on the side of truth. **It is the only way open to us. All else will prove futile.**

### **Where We Are**

Sometimes I feel toward our homeland like I felt when I was a youngster and the family had gone into the Smoky Mountains for a brief vacation. One day it rained in torrents and there were landslides, one that took away about half of the roadway back

down the mountain. I recall traffic being backed up for miles and patrol officers carefully directed each car across the narrow ledge that could still be used. In time, it was our turn to pass the slide area. Everyone except my father walked across, as was being done with each family, and Dad drove the car. As everyone watched, and the story was repeated with each vehicle, great concern existed lest that which remained cave in.

I feel at times America is standing on a ledge that appears could collapse, but so many are unconcerned to the danger as they blindly, foolishly, defiantly run their own ways to the disregard of God. Even many in the church are straining at gnats, swallowing camels, missing the mark, restructuring and redirecting the church into paths of compromise and the failures of the world, fumbling at hobbies and imitating denominations. Like the proverbial ostrich, some hide their heads in the sands, pretending it is not so.

Woodrow Wilson once said, "I had rather be right and lose than be wrong and win." How we need thie spirit among us! Christians will not ultimately lose because they have God's promise of eternal victory. But Christians are also concerned for others, for future generations, and have respect and gratitude for that which was done in the past that has provided them tremendous blessings. Christians, though centering their concerns on eternity, are not aware that this life is the time of preparation for eternity and must concern themselves with that which is around them. Hope for the nation, we believe, is not beyond us. But we must awaken from the slumber and lethargy that characterizes so many.

We shall not stand before God in judgment as a nation, but as individuals. Each one must be concerned for his or her soul as well as the souls of others. Salvation is only in Christ. Faith and obedience to the gospel is God's plan and all who shall be saved must comply.

† † † † †

(from page 14)

teacher" to hold their meeting if he will be quiet, I will not give aid and support to those who actually do hold false doctrines, having turned from truth we both once held. So I cancelled it.

False doctrines continue to take their toll among brethren. There are many unstable "Reubens" who are members of the church, leaving truth, accepting error that accomodates sin.



**John**  
**William**  
**Boyd**



This is an very early picture of our sixth grandchild, our fourth grandson, born August 13th of this year, 1987. His parents are Bill, our son, and Lori, daughter of Clifford and Jean Reel, Onieda, TN, where he preaches.

John has a sister, Rose, and brother, Cliff. They live in Chattanooga, TN.

It goes withou saying, but say it anyway, that we are so proud of John and have loved him from the moment we heard he was coming our way. Few things, if anything, in life is as wonderful as knowledge that your children walk in truth. John will have a home where Christ reigns.

\* \* \* \* \*

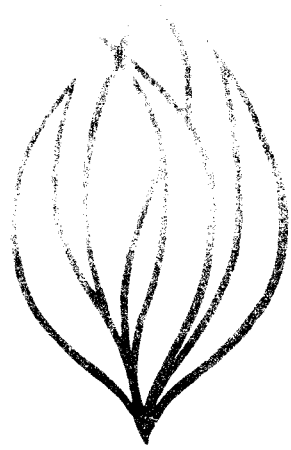
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# Burning Fire



“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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# **Who Is Not A Christian**

The word "Christian" is commonly heard in everyday conversation. It obviously means different things to different people because so much is included by some with the word that is excluded by others. It is fair to say that the word is misused because positions that are opposite to one another cannot both be correct, the philosophy of Humanism notwithstanding. We would contend that the term is used by many in ways that the Bible never suggests. "Christian" is used as a noun, name, adjective with reference to people, attitudes, spirits, behavior, actions, churches, and all sorts of doctrines and religious positions, even political groups. Generally speaking, the world is far more liberal than what the Scriptures allow.

As we investigate to learn how Scripture uses the term, we must remember to "*speak as the oracles of God.*" (First Peter 4:11). We must keep in mind that the term is a designation of divine origin. In Isaiah 62:2, "*And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name.*" This prophecy notes that when the Gentiles as well as Jews are included among God's people, God will designate a name for them. In Acts 11:26, "*And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*" Antioch was the first congregation to include both Jews and Gentiles of which we read in Scripture.

This should forever silence the false contentions that the term "Christian" was given the disciples of Christ in derision by their enemies or as a nickname. Rather it is a divinely given name. The word translated "*called*" in Acts 11:26 has reference to that which Deity has done. This name was given apostolic approval by Peter in First Peter 4:16 and by Paul in Acts 26:28. It has been universally accepted by faithful followers of Christ from the time it was first given.

## **Nothing In A Name?**

We sometimes hear people say, usually in defense of religious names for which there is no divine authority, "There is nothing in a name." But nobody really believes that, It is just a way of excusing what is Biblically inexcusable. Nobody names their

children after Judas or Jezebel, or even Fido. They want the correct names on their property deeds and paychecks. Companies demand proper labels on their products. Even religious people who say there is nothing in a name take a name unto themselves to designate them as distinguished from others.

The name "Christian" gives honor to the One we follow, Jesus Christ. It was used with reference to those who were in a saved relationship with God by and through the Son and Savior He sent into the world. The name by which disciples of Christ are called is a worthy name (James 2:7). But the name is often applied to that which is not of Christ according to the Bible.

The name "Christian" is, like all names, exclusive in nature. Your personal name, your family name, is meant to include only you or your family. When your name includes you it automatically excludes everyone else. The same is true with any name properly used and understood. So it is with the name "Christian." It is inclusive but also exclusive. We should not be surprised by this. But we should learn whom God includes and whom He excludes in using the name.

### **Dogmatic**

Many object to this conclusion that it is being dogmatic. One's attitude on being dogmatic can be objectionable. But being dogmatic, per se, is not evil. There is nothing wrong in being dogmatic and narrow as Scripture. There is nothing bigoted, self-righteous, or judgmental in an evil sense about taking Scripture without addition or subtraction. We do not find people objecting to being narrow and dogmatic in others fields of thought and activity. Only in religion do some think it must be wrong to be right. This inconsistency is seen in following recipes, dialing telephones, filling medicine prescriptions and other matters. What many have not learned is that the way of Christ is far more narrow than most realize.

### **Just A Good Man?**

The term "Christian" is often used to include all "good" people. We hear people say, "He was a good, Christian man." It may be that a person is exactly that. A Christian is to be good. But people can have many good characteristics about them and not be Christians. Morality is expected of a Christian, but one can be moral without being in Christ. There are many people

who are upright in many ways as far as anyone can determine. They are good neighbors, good citizens, are helpful to those in need, fair and honest in dealing with their fellowman, even refraining from questionable behavior, using clean language and many other good things. But being morally good does not make one a Christian. We are not saved by our works of merit of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9).

We all can be thankful for any good person. We have heard some thoughtless people say they had just as soon a person be a criminal as to not be a Christian. Well, count me out of that number. I much prefer to live next door to somebody who respects morality than someone who does not. Society is far better when people are good than when they are not. Life is more tolerable and enjoyable among good people. But the point is, we, like Cornelius (Acts 10), can be good and still be lost because being saved demands more than simply being good, as important as that certainly is. Nicodemus, Lydia and the man from Ethiopia all had many good things about them, but they were lost. Because being good is expected of a Christian many have become confused in thinking that being good is all that really matters in becoming and being a Christian.

### **Just Religious?**

All religious people are not Christians, and none would deny that. Case after case of those who became Christians as recorded in the New Testament were first religious people. They were honest, sincere and zealous in their religious faith and practice, but they were not followers of Jesus Christ.

Not even all church members are Christians. People can belong to churches that the Lord did not establish, and even claim to be a Christian. But they cannot become Christians by following the doctrines of men and failing to obey the gospel of Christ. The Lord does not teach us just to become members of some church. He teaches us to obey the gospel and He adds us to His church (Acts 2:47).

Denominationalism has historically confused people about the importance of the church. This is an age of hyphenated Christianity, which is not New Testament religion at all. People say they are Baptists, Methodists, Episcopalians, and any number of denominational names, but all claim they are Christians. The New Testament knows nothing of this kind of so-called but misnamed Christianity. The church is not a

denomination, nor the sum total of denominations. Scripture has nothing to do with denominations except to condemn the error and division which it propagates and upon which it feeds. That system of religion is entirely a concoction of men, and is not of God. A person is either a Christian, and he must be a faithful Christian, or he is lost. Christ is not divided (First Corinthians 1:13).

### **Not In Old Testament**

Obviously people who lived in Old Testament times were not Christians because the faith of Christ had not yet come upon the earth during their lifetime. Those who lived under earlier dispensations, such as Abraham, Moses, Joshua, even John the Baptist, all ceased to walk among men before the will and way of Christ was inaugurated on the first Pentecost following His ascension.

### **Not Just Any Faith**

What may come as a surprise to many is that all who have faith are not Christians. One may agree with every word of the Bible, believe it, that is, giving mental assent that it is true, but such "faith" standing alone saves nobody and makes nobody a Christian.

Saving faith is an obedient faith, and without works of obedience faith is dead and a dead faith cannot save (James 2:20,26). One must obey for Christ to be his Savior (Hebrews 5:9). In no way does obedience earn salvation, but in no way does faith save until one obeys, including repentance (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38), confession of Christ (Acts 8:37; Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10), and baptism into Christ (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4; Acts 22:16; Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; First Peter 3:21). Those in New Testament times who heard the gospel, believed in Christ, and obeyed these commands were added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:47), and that church is composed of Christians. Those who have not yet rendered obedience in faith to what the gospel commands are not yet Christians according to the teaching of the New Testament.

### **To Be Faithful**

Let us not forget that it is one thing to become a Christian and

a lifelong activity to be a faithful Christian. One can obey these first principles of the gospel and thereby become a child of God, a Christian, but renounce his Father and family and be disinherited. While he can still be called a Christian in the sense that he has become a child of God, he is not a faithful child and salvation will not be his in eternity unless he does as the Father pleads and comes home again, being restored to God's family through repentance (Acts 8:22), confession of sins, (First John 1:9), and prayer to God for forgiveness (Acts 8:22).

Sometimes people who are willing to accept just what the Bible teaches and will not allow more or less are criticized for thinking they are the only Christians. This is an unfair criticism. Nobody has the right to claim to be a Christian until he or she has done what the New Testament says one must do to become a Christian. It is neither bigoted nor self-righteous to simply "*contend for the faith*" as it is revealed.

We would that all were Christians after the New Testament order. We work to that end. But we cannot and will not compromise with error to appease anything or anybody regarding who is and who is not a Christian. We have no right to do so. We must abide by the Biblical use of the Biblical term.

† † † † †

## ***God's Displeasure At Adultery And Apostasy***

*Ezekiel 16:35-42, "Wherefore, O harlot, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God; Because thy filtness was poured out and thy nakedness discovered through thy whoredoms with thy lovers, and with all the idols of thy abominations, and by the blood of thy children, which thou didst give unto them; Behold, therefore I will gather all thy lovers, with whom thou hast taken pleasure, and all them that thou hast loved, with all them that thou hast hated; I will even gather them round about against thee, and will discover thy nakedness unto them, that they may see all thy nakedness. And I will judge thee, as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy. And I will also give thee into their*

*hand, and they shall throw down thine eminent place, and shall break down thy high places: they shall strip thee also of thy clothes, and shall take thy fair jewels, and leave thee naked and bare. They shall bring up a company against thee, and shall stone thee with stones, and thrust thee through with their swords. And they shall burn thine houses with fire, and execute judgments upon thee in the sight of many women: and I will cause thee to cease from playing the harlot, and thou shalt give no hire anymore. So I will make my fury toward thee to rest, and my jealousy shall depart from thee, and I will be quiet, and will be no more angry."*

This presents God's attitude toward a sinful people. In this instance the people were a special disappointment to God for they were the nation of Judah. God had preserved this people through the ages because through them was to come the Messiah. When Northern Israel was overrun by the Assyrians, God protected Judah and its capital from being overthrown. Yet, in spite of the vivid demonstration before them what sin does to a nation, Judah persisted in the ways of evil and was now on the brink of destruction.

The prophet Ezekiel, who spoke to the people of Judah before the Babylonian captivity, speaks again. The first twenty-four chapters of his book deal with the coming destruction due to the sinfulness of the nation. The theme might well be called, "Jerusalem must fall." Chapter sixteen is a warning to the people of their punishment that would come corresponding to their sins. The land was doomed.

### **A Picture Of Judah**

Judah is pictured as a harlot, a prostitute, one guilty of whoredom. This was true of the nation both physically and spiritually. The people engaged in fornication, adultery, all manner of sexual perversions such as would characterize heathen people. Not only were they guilty of this sin of the flesh, they were guilty of heathen religions and worship practices, serving false gods, idolatry and all manner of unfaithfulness to God.

We must remember that Judah belonged to God. They were His people, the descendants of Abraham, His chosen ones. They were expected to be faithful to God as a wife is expected to be faithful to her husband. Yet, Judah had not kept the vows of fidelity and it was accurate to picture Judah as a harlot.

Who had been Judah's "lovers" with whom she had committed this spiritual adultery against God? They were the surrounding heathen and idolatrous nations such as Assyria, Babylon, Egypt and others. Judah had partaken of their ways and neglected or totally abandoned God's ways. They had adopted the very things God prohibited. The result was a flagrant violation of God's laws and gross disobedience.

Ezekiel explains that because of Judah's spiritual adultery Judah would be punished. She would be humiliated before all nations. She had dishonored herself and brought shame on her name. She would soon be loathsome even to her former "lovers." But what was worse, she was an abomination before God to whom she belonged.

The Lord said Judah would be treated as a woman who breaks the vows of wedlock. Under Mosaic Law, adulterers were stoned to death. Judah also would be destroyed. In fact, Judah's downfall did come literally by stoning. The Babylonians took huge stones and hurled them against the walls and buildings of the city until it was crushed throughout. The national dignity of the nation was torn asunder and ruined.

Still being considered as a harlot, her desecration would be so complete, and she would become so hideous before all, that she would not be desirable to anyone. Such is the picture of a wicked nation that did reap what had been sown. Reduced from her former glory, now she was to be overcome because of her sins and would exist in distress and doom. Those that were once God's people brought themselves to such a state.

### **Our Lesson**

There are valuable lessons for us from the mistakes of Judah as we observe God's attitude toward them and the way He dealt with them. Romans 15:4 reads, *"Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."* Paul wrote again in First Corinthians 10:11, *"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come."* Let us learn what is intended to be learned.

### **Adultery**

Do we not understand that God is displeased with adultery?

Adultery is a sexual intercourse between a married person and another to whom the first is not married. Similarly, God is displeased with fornication which is a broader and more inclusive term. It includes adultery, such as sexual relationships between two who are not married, homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality and all manner of the misuse of a God-given desire. It is very disturbing that such transgressions are so commonplace in our society. The minds of many in the nation have become so twisted and distorted that they have resorted to such conduct. Our society, in many areas, borders on so-called "free love." Illicit conduct is sanctioned, even promoted, especially by those whose concern is more for money than morals. Some seek gain, not God. So much of the nation's reading material is pornographic with indecent pictures. This is even found at times in the daily newspaper ads. It all amounts to a Satanic cesspool of degeneracy. The so-called entertainment world is saturated with immorality and every kind of violation is featured in movies, television programs, dramatic plays, songs, even sporting events. The "soaps" feature sex without benefit of marriage. Ninety-four per cent of sex on the "soaps" is between people not married to each other. In our land we have such a distorted concept of sex that sex is used to sell everything. Mass efforts are made to arouse sexual senses and seek satisfactions without regard to divine teaching. Premarital sex is an epidemic with accompanying diseases. Extra-marital sex is no longer looked upon as abominable by many. Our land is corrupt and seemingly getting more and more like Judah before God wiped her away.

Those who love God and respect His Word will neither engage in such things, condone such things, but will actively oppose such things. Regardless of what public standards of morality may be or have become, regardless of what becomes stylish and acceptable, regardless of what the majority says or does, regardless to what extent one's passions may be aroused by the efforts of evil people, God will damn the fornicator, the adulterer, the sexual pervert, unless they seek forgiveness of their sins, which demands repentance and cessation of them. Galatians 5:19 makes this so clear that no person of mental capacity to be accountable can mistake it. Illicit sexual behavior is a flagrant transgression and trespass of divine instruction. It is an open and defiant disregard of Almighty God, the Judge.

One not only loses virtue, self-respect, purity, honor, but any hope of heaven but an assurance of hell unless forgiven. "Thou

*shalt not commit adultery*" has been God's law and remains so. First Thessalonians 4:3-5, *"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication, that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor, not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God."*

### **Consequences**

Seeing the dire consequences of such sins, we ought to keep ourselves away from circumstances and conditions that would tempt and provoke us to seek and satisfy our passions unlawfully. The sexual drive in the human body is not sinful of itself. It is of God and therefore pure and holy. God has placed this drive within mankind but also given regulation of it. Outside of the bond of marriage sex is, has been and will be sin. It is sin against self, against others, against God. It will mean hell for those who disobey and are not forgiven.

Notice how God uses this blight of sin of adultery to define His attitude toward apostasy, turning from Him. To turn away from God is to seal our eternal banishment from His glory and assure our eternal punishment in hell. To show His displeasure toward apostasy the Holy Spirit uses the strongest of terms, and symbols, to depict that displeasure at apostasy. James 4:4, *"Ye adulterers and adulteresses; know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."* The world refers to the sinfulness so characteristic of the world. Those who side against God and choose the side of evil are enemies of God. James calls them adulterers and adulteresses. This would certainly be true of those who commit physical adultery, but here it also emphasizes spiritual adultery by being unfaithful to God and friends with wickedness.

### **Apostasy**

Apostasy means desertion, abandonment of what was once professed, forsaking what was once held. Some teach that a Christian cannot so sin as to lose his soul once he has come to Christ. They teach a doctrine of "once saved, always saved." They teach the impossibility of apostasy in spite of what Scripture teaches. They call their doctrine the doctrine of eternal security regardless of what transpires thereafter.

The doctrine is an old one, having originated with the devil in the Garden of Eden when Satan tempted Eve with the idea that she could not fall. Even though God told them they would die the day they ate the forbidden fruit, the devil said, "You won't die. You can't fall. Actually you will be gods." So they ate, but died that day in a spiritual separation from God and were driven from the Garden of Eden.

Paul warned in First Corinthians 10:12, "*Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*" This warning amounts to nonsense if one cannot fall. Paul told the Galatian church that some had already fallen (Galatians 5:4). Many first century Christians fell away, including Demas, Simon the former sorcerer and some brethren in Ephesus. Paul warned of disciples being drawn away (Acts 20:30). How dare some say it cannot be done. Paul warned how the church would drift into apostasy (First Timothy 4:1ff). Revelation 22:19 speaks of those whose names are blotted out of the book of life. Names were once there, but blotted out. Who says it cannot happen? It tells us in the Bible it has happened and can happen. Whose word is to be believed? Will it be some denominational clergyman with his human creed, or the Word of God? Every New Testament epistle includes warnings against apostasy and/or admonitions to faithfulness. There must be a reason for this.

### **What God Thinks**

Second Peter 2:20-22 shows us God's attitude toward those who fall away into apostasy. Let the serious Bible student take serious note of this passage. How tragic it is for one once saved to become as Peter describes.

It is wonderful when a sinner becomes a Christian, remains loyal, lives and dies in the Lord. But when one becomes a Christian, being forgiven of past sins, only to turn back again into sin, it is a tragedy because that which was lost, although found, is lost again, worse condition than the first.

We must shun fornication, adultery and kindred sins. Remember God's displeasure toward such things and that doom awaits those who commit them.

Some may have been persuaded not to obey the gospel because of a fear that they could not remain faithful. Surely, one must remain faithful. But an awareness that one must remain faithful, and that one can fall, is a giant step toward the prevention of that fall. One need not fall. He will be more likely

to remain alert and faithful because he knows he can fall. But a race is never won if never begun. One cannot finish what he never starts. Out of Christ we remain lost. Only in Christ can we be saved. We can be faithful in Christ because God never commands what we cannot do.

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## ***The Suffering Christ***

First Peter 3:18, *"For Christ also hath once suffered for sins..."* First Corinthians 2:2, *"For I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified."*

In every generation since Pentecost God's children have been called upon to suffer for the sake of Christ. Second Timothy 2:3, *"Thou therefore endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ."* Second Timothy 3:12, *"Yea, and all that will live godly shall suffer persecution."* Matthew 5:10-12, *"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad; for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."*

Our suffering should be for welldoing rather than for doing evil. First Peter 3:14,17, *"But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye; and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled... For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for welldoing, than for evil doing."* First Peter 4:12-16, *"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."*

## **Suffering Unjustly**

But when one thinks of suffering wrongfully, and for righteousness' sake, one must think of Christ. First Peter 2:21-25, *"For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps, who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth, who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committeth himself to him that judgeth righteously; who his own self bare our sins in his body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."*

We can be encouraged when we meditate on the suffering of Christ. When we measure the extent of His sorrow, we are made ashamed that we complain of our own troubles. We are encouraged to bear with patience any hardship imposed upon us because of our convictions in the faith of Christ. We realize His suffering was motivated by His love for us and we are therefore inspired to live better in spite of persecutions.

## **Nobility**

There is much more to the suffering of Christ, His death on Calvary, than the suffering of a martyr for a cause even when the cause is just and noble. Many have suffered for noble causes. Christ suffered for a noble cause. But Peter presents a higher aspect of the Lord's suffering than that. Even in His suffering He proved (1) His superiority above all else, (2) the concern that He always has for mankind, (3) it was a necessary part of God's plan for saving mankind that He suffered as He did. We want to note three primary points in our text about the suffering of Christ. Our lesson is an attempt to preach Christ and Him crucified.

Peter presents a fact about the suffering of Christ when he said, *"Christ also suffered for sins once."* This affirms the all-sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ. He died for sins and He died only once and that was all that was necessary.

His suffering and death is given prominence in the New Testament more than His birth, being mentioned more than any other single event. Some one hundred seventy five times there is reference to His death. Between twenty five and thirty

per cent of the first four books of the New Testament are concerned with the last week of His life on earth before His death. It is apparent that the Holy Spirit, through the Word, desired that we know more about His death and suffering than most anything else about Him. He suffered for sins, carrying our sins in His body to the cross as a sacrificial victim. He is truly, *"the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world."* (John 1:29).

### **Once**

Again we give special emphasis of Scripture that He died once. Under the old Law of Moses sacrifices were made on a regular basis, some daily, some yearly. But the sacrifice of Christ was once (Hebrews 7:26,27; 9:25-28; 10:1-4). Being the final sacrifice, it was completely adequate to satisfy the God of heaven and was to never occur again. The superiority of His sacrifice is evidenced by being done once.

Romanism contends that the "mass" that is a part of their worship is the continual sacrifice of Christ. This is contradictory to the Scriptural affirmation regarding the one sacrifice of Christ.

It is according to God's plan for the redemption of man that the death of Christ provide sufficient power for the forgiveness of sin. Whereas sins were "rolled forward" year by year by the sacrifices under the Law of Moses, His sacrifice provided all that was needed to cleanse every heart and soul of every sin.

### **The Nature Of His Suffering**

It is important that we understand the nature of His suffering. By this we mean it was a death of the righteous on behalf of the unrighteous. First Peter 3:18, *"...the just for the unjust..."* First Peter 2:22, *"Who did no sin..."* Christ did not die for His own sins. He had none. Though tempted as we are, He was without sin (Hebrews 4:15). His death was for others inasmuch as *"he by the grace of God should taste of death for every man."* (Hebrews 2:9). In the announcement to Mary of His coming birth she was told how *"he shall save his people from their sins."* (Matthew 1:21). Christ *"gave himself a ransom for many."* (Second Timothy 2:6). He came into the world to save sinners (First Timothy 1:15). His blood was shed *"for the remission of sin."* (Matthew 26:28). First Corinthians 15:3, *"...how that Christ died for our sins..."* Other passages that teach the same

theme are Romans 8:3 and Romans 5:6-9. The truth is clearly established. Christ died for sins, though not His own, but for the sins of the whole world (First John 2:2).

His death is rightly called a vicarious death, meaning that it was on the behalf and for the benefit of another. He served as a substitute for sinful man. Somebody had to pay for sins and God provided His only begotten Son to stand in the stead of the guilty. The good died for the bad; the perfect on behalf of the imperfect, meaning mankind.

The text also reveals the purpose of His suffering in another way. *"That he might bring us to God."* He was the atonement, which might be looked upon as the "at-one-ment." He made it possible for us to be united with Deity and in fellowship. Sin is the barrier between God and man (Isaiah 59:1,2), but Christ is *"our peace."* (Ephesians 2:14). In a sense, man declares war against God by sinning and there is need for reconciliation. God designed things that Christ would be the only way for man to be reconciled to God (John 3:16; 14:6; Acts 4:12; Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:13).

### **Why This Plan?**

But why did God devise this kind of plan? Could not God have devised some other way? There is no question that God could have made it possible for mankind to be saved any number of ways if He has seen fit to do so. The fact remains that He planned it through the death of Christ.

The defilement of sin is offensive to the Lord. His holiness, goodness, purity and nature demands that the sinner be separated from his sins. God's justice demands the sinner be punished. But His mercy requires that the sinner be given opportunity to live. His love said He would allow Jesus Christ to suffer in the stead of the guilty. The justice and mercy of God met at the cross of Christ (Romans 3:26). Only the spotless, sinless and perfect Being without blemish could have stoned for the sins of another. Only Deity would be sufficient for this. Therefore, Christ, as God's Son, took on the form of man, humbled Himself, became obedient to the death on the cross, that He, by death, might bring us to God (Philippians 2:7,8).

The fact that God so loved man that He sent Jesus to be sacrificed is the most powerful appeal that can be made to man to motivate him to come to God. Jesus said, *"Greater love hath*

*no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”* (John 15:13). Yet, even while we were yet sinful, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). By His death He ransomed us from the grasp of Satan. Matthew 20:28, *“Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”* We sold our souls to Satan by sinning, and by His death He paid the ransom price for our redemption. He bought us with a price (First Corinthians 6:20) and that price was His blood (Acts 20:28).

### **Salvation Provided**

Though the way of salvation has been provided by His suffering, we can benefit from His death only by coming to the blood of Christ and being washed in His blood. As the Psalmist wrote, *“...wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.”* (Psalm 51:7). In Revelation 7:14 the redeemed are said to have had their robes washed *“and made them clean in the blood of the Lamb.”* Isaiah had prophesied, *“Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”* (Isaiah 1:18).

The way God has provided for mankind for reach the soul-cleansing blood of Christ is in obedience to the command to be baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4), and this is when and where His blood was shed (John 19:34). God applies the blood of Christ to the sin-stained soul upon our obedience to His command and it is then we are raised to a newness of life, being born again, new creatures in Christ, having been washed by His blood. To refuse to obey is to discount His suffering and render it of no value or spiritual benefit to yourself. Each must decide to respect His sacrifice by rendering submission to the will of the Lord.

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### **Jumping At Conclusions**

*“He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him.”* (Proverbs 18:13). It is better to hear all of a matter before drawing conclusions. Grave mistakes in judgment are made when determined without benefit of a full knowledge of the matter.

JWB

# **David's Charge To Solomon**

At the time of our lesson David had grown old and would soon die. He had promised Bathsheba that their son, Solomon, would be the next king. But she became properly concerned over the activities of Adonijah, one of David's sons, who was engaged in a movement to become the next king himself. Having secured the support from Abiathar, the priest, and Joab, captain of David's army, Adonijah was already making plans for a coronation feast and had invited many guests.

When David was informed of this, even though confined to his bed, he quickly called Zadok, another priest, Nathan, the prophet, and Benaiah, captain of his bodyguards and the Jerusalem police, and gave them instructions concerning Solomon. They were to put Solomon on the king's mule, take him through the streets declaring him as David's choice to be the next king. When the people saw what was done they rallied behind Solomon and shouted, "*Long live king Solomon.*"

This abruptly concluded the celebration Adonijah had planned and rather than becoming king he sought for mercy from Solomon, which he received temporarily.

## **Solomon Crowned**

Because Solomon was proclaimed king so hurriedly there was no time for a genuine celebration and ceremony. So David instructed a more formal assembly and it was at that time he gave certain solemn charges to the new king, his son. Present were all the princes of Israel, the captains of the companies, the rulers who had superintendence of the affairs of state, and all the mighty men of the nation. It was an occasion when anybody that was anybody in government was invited and present.

David stood to speak even though it was difficult for him. He called for one and all to give allegiance unto God, and also unto Solomon as the incoming king. The purpose of the gathering was to secure for Solomon support from all of those who had been loyal to David. In this action we see the wisdom of David, knowing as he did that one cannot effectively lead if he cannot

depend on his followers. Many leaders, even good leaders, have failed because of a rebellious spirit on the part of those who are suppose to be followers.

Sacrifices were offered and this was followed by a great coronation feast. Solomon was hailed as the new king and anointed the second time.

Following this array of pomp and ceremony, impressive as it was, David spoke a few words. They can be divided into two parts. He had some things to say about himself, recalling his past and an old man might be excused for doing this. There was far more of his life in the past than in his earthly future. Then he turned his attention to Solomon personally and offered him sage counsel. The scriptures that recorded these remarks are in First Chronicles 28:1-10. Because of the length of this passage the reader is urged to take his Bible and become acquainted with the reading before continuing with our remarks.

### **David's Intent**

Some great things can be learned from David's recollections of the past. He mentioned his intentions to have built a house for the Lord. It was to have been a place to house the ark of the covenant and where Jehovah would make His presence known in special manners. It was to be a most expensive and elaborately decorated edifice, richly done in every respect. Yet, David called this planned building nothing more than a footstool for the Lord. Does this not indicate the genuine humility of David and his appreciation for the greatness of God? He did not propose to build a throne for the Lord, but only a footstool, which was all he could do.

David consulted Nathan about building this house and Nathan had advised him to proceed with his plans. But this was before either David or Nathan had consulted the Lord about it. God later told Nathan, and he in turn told David, that David was not to erect such a structure because he had been a man of war and blood.

I think we have a great lesson before us how a person with honest and sincere motives can be presumptuous when they embark on something without the Lord's approval and authority. We cannot just assume that whatever we do will please God. We must inquire of His will before we draw such conclusions. God did tell David that his son would build the house David proposed and David spent much energy gathering

materials that would later be used.

This episode of David's life also tells us more about the heart of David. Doubtless he was disappointed that God had not approved what he wanted to do. But just because David did not get his way he did not turn against God. Rather than doing nothing, and pouting about it, he busied himself with additional preparations for that which would come after him.

### **David's Past**

David also recalled how God had selected him to be king. This stirs our memory to Samuel's visit to the house of Jesse many years earlier and when all the sons of Jesse came before Samuel. But none that were there were chosen and they waited until David was brought from the fields where he had been attending the herds. Samuel anointed him. Samuel was told at that time that man looks on the outward appearance but God looks on the heart, and God approved the heart of David.

David recounted all these things for a good reason. He was laying the groundwork and background to show how God had also selected Solomon just as He had selected David. The king, whoever he was to be, would sit on the throne of the Lord. Therefore, whoever the king was to be was obligated first and foremost to Jehovah God. His allegiance was first to God and then to the people he ruled. Is not that the way it should be for every national leader?

### **God's Choice**

Not only had God chosen Solomon, but the Lord had promised to establish his kingdom forever. But this promise was a conditional one. *"If he be constant to do my commandments and mine ordinances as at this day..."* (verse 7). The inescapable implication is that at that moment of his life Solomon was walking the way Jehovah would have him go. We can only wish that it had remained that way with Solomon. But the story of Solomon is somewhat akin to that of King Saul who had a glorious beginning but who later turned from the way of the Lord and brought discredit upon himself and the people he led. Solomon, by marrying women from the pagan and heathen nations, compromised his faith and allowed idols to be erected and served them.

Notice that Solomon and the people were to *"observe and*

*seek out all the commandments.*" Some people then, like now, observe what they like and ignore what does not suit them. Someway they have convinced themselves that they are not obligated to comply with all of the commandments of God and embark upon a course of selectivity, following some and omitting others. But the Lord wanted them not only to observe His commandments, but seek them out, being sure they were doing as commanded. He expects no less of people today. This is the reason for diligent study that we might know. We are responsible for both knowledge and application.

Finally, David turns to Solomon to with admonitions that would be fitting for every parent to give every child. His admonition can be outlined in three parts.

### **Parental Advice**

First, *"Know thou the God of thy father."* This, of course, referred to Jehovah God. Solomon should not be satisfied with just a passing acquaintance and warm feelings toward God and the knowledge that God existed. He was to have a close association with God. As John wrote in the New Testament First John 2:3, *"And hereby we do know that we know him if we keep his commandments."* This is the kind of knowledge of God that we all must have and it cannot be ours without obedience. To know God demands that we obey God.

Second, *"Serve him with a perfect heart."* This demands a complete submission and willingness voluntarily offered. It calls for such a mind. Acceptable service to God must come from the heart. To proceed through various forms of service without it being voluntary and willingly given is to attempt to serve God but without the purity of motive.

Perfect does not mean sinless perfection, which is impossible. But it means the heart is completely surrendered to the way of the Lord without reservation. God will know if one serves Him with all the heart or not because God knows the heart. Our fruits also reveal the heart. Jesus once taught that we are to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength.

Third, *"If thou seek him, he will be found of thee. But if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off forever."* The decision whether God and Solomon would remain as close as they were at that moment rested with Solomon. It was strictly up to him. God would cleave to Solomon as long as Solomon would honor and respect God and as long as Solomon wanted God to remain

with him, and he showed this desire by the manner of life he lived. But if Solomon wished he could separate himself from God. This is the way God has always dealt with everybody, even now. He does not force Himself upon us, but is willing to abide with those who are willing to abide with Him. Each of us must make the personal choice.

### **Word Of Warning**

Having said all these things, David closed with a warning in verse 10. *"Take heed now, for the Lord hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary; be strong, and do it."* Here was the word of caution. *"Take heed."* He would have to be strong to be the king he needed to be and to build the house David had proposed. Added to this charge, as recorded in First Kings 2:2, were the words, *"And show thyself a man."* Real manhood required maturity, knowing God through obedience to God, serving God with all of his heart, remaining faithful to God and being alert and attentive to every duty.

As we study the career and life of Solomon we are impressed how for many years he gave heed to these well chosen words of admonition from his father. It seems he later ignored them and went the way of disgrace and spiritual failure. Whether he died in such a state we cannot know for certain. But David's words should ring loud in our own ears because we all have been charged by the Lord to know God, serve God, and take heed. Our promises are also conditional upon our obedience to God.

As Solomon was given the sacred task of erecting God's temple, those who are Christians have a similar task in upbuilding His spiritual temple which is the church.

We see that Solomon began well but later faltered. We must be alert and not allow such as that overtake us. It remains with you and me to determine how it will be with us. May God's will be so respected by each of us that we shall discharge our duties to God's approval.

David, Solomon's parent, gave his son good advice and counsel. Can a parent do more? Should we not teach our young by word and deed to *"show thyself a man,"* meaning a person of spiritual quality? What higher and nobler goal for life could we present to our children?

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# **Paul Rebukes Peter**

*Galatians 2:11-21, "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain Gentiles came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ a minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet, not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."*

## **Paul Versus Peter**

Paul tells of this encounter with Cephas or Peter. Peter had come to Antioch for reasons unrevealed, but most likely to be of assistance in the cause of Christ as he had done in Samaria in Acts 8. But Paul says Peter stood in error in a certain matter and Paul resisted him. He opposed him to his face and before all who were concerned. Can we suppose that Peter was really a "pope" and being openly and publicly rebuked for sinning? Who could imagine such a thing toward the "pope" of Rome who claims to be "Peter's successor"?

Here were two giant pillars in the church standing at odds.

Some today might have criticized Paul for doing what he did. Some would have advised that he not cause any trouble, keep the peace, let harmony continue. But the harmony and peace had already been broken and trouble already stirred by the error of Peter. Paul did not create the situation, but began working to remedy it. Only those who are passive toward error and compromising toward truth would advise error be left alone and truth allowed to be buried for the sake of a misguided "peace." Peter had started the trouble and Paul would have been negligent not to deal with it. It is never right to appease sin and make it appear wrong is right.

Public sin was publicly rebuked. It should be done this way, especially when committed by those of prominence lest others think that sin is not sin. Prominent brethren can lead weaker brethren astray. When someone of note goes astray, all the more reason to expose the error. Peter's error was adversely influencing others, even Barnabas, Paul's companion on his first journey to take the gospel to Gentiles. Of all people who should have known there should be no racial discrimination in the Lord's church, it should have been Barnabas, unless Peter should have known it even better. It is bad when brethren err. It is worse when error is swept under the rug uncorrected. But how many prefer nothing be said or done in the face of error if brother Big is involved?

### **The Issue**

What was the wrong Peter committed that caused Paul to take issue with him? Peter, a Jew, was visiting a church where there were Gentiles. At first he did not let this racial difference determine his association but treated all brethren as brethren. This would be expected of Peter since he had been the one to first take the gospel to Gentiles at the house of Cornelius, recorded in Acts 10. He had been outspoken at the conference in Jerusalem when such matters were discussed, as recorded in Acts 11 and 15. The conclusion of those meetings was that the gospel is for all without respect to race, and salvation was offered to everyone on the same terms. Peter was now acting inconsistently with that truth and making distinction among his brethren, fearing those who were Jewish Christians lest they not approve of him.

Certain ones came from James, meaning Jerusalem, where there remained those who were confused about accepting

Gentiles. While it was all right for Jews to follow their customs, they could not bind their religious laws seeing that the law was no longer operative, having been nailed to the cross. One of the problems with many Jewish brethren was their attempt to make their customs and laws binding on others as if such was God's will. They acted as if racial differences made a difference in one's acceptability before God.

While Peter once realized this error, now he was practicing it. He pulled himself away from his Gentile brethren under the pressure of the presence of his Jewish brethren. Paul pointed out to him that he simply could not have it both ways.

Peter's actions were disturbing and disrupting the church in Antioch. He was causing others to take this same faulty course of action. Paul did not express his personal opinion about the matter, but charged that they *"walked not according to the truth of the gospel."* It was a matter of faith.

It is not unknown for men who are usually good to sometimes bow before the fear of others and be carried away by personal prejudices. Paul reasoned, if Peter had been living as a Gentile, even though he was a Jew, why did he now require the Gentile to live as a Jew? Peter was guilty of doing the very thing he once realized was wrong. He was using his influence to perpetuate the very idea that he once knew to be error. Even today, as I write these words, names of prominent brethren among us come to mind for doing in principle the very same thing because they seem to have shifted their positions to accomodate the largest number of people rather than being consistent with once, stated convictions that they preached and practiced. It is a sad spectacle to behold when good men do such a thing.

### **Inconsistency**

It is an indication that something is wrong when one is inconsistent. One might at one time contend for truth and then depart from it and be inconsistent. He might once have contended for error and now hold the truth and he is inconsistent, but for the better. But when there is inconsistency, something is wrong somewhere, either at the first or later. Inconsistency may embarass us, but being wrong can condemn us. One should prefer inconsistency when going from wrong to right, but to go from right to wrong is both inconsistent and deadly. In this instance Peter had once been right and was now wrong and inconsistent.

Paul further reasoned if the ways of the Jews must be adopted by Gentiles to be saved, then Christ died in vain. If the old law could have saved, why was the new one given? Man cannot be justified by the old Law of Moses. Paul impressed this upon them all and showed the superiority of the faith of Christ.

Those today who wish to hold to the old law make void the grace of God. Galatians 5:4, "*Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.*" The truth was they were not really justified at all, but had voided their salvation by returning to that which cannot save. Paul said that would frustrate God's grace.

Such teaching does not render the Old Testament valueless. We study it and respect the record as inspired of God because all Scripture is inspired of God (Second Timothy 3:16,17). There is much profit for us as Paul states in Romans 15:4 and First Corinthians 10:11, but we must recognize that the law was but a shadow of things to come (Colossians 2:17).

### **Dead To The Old Law**

One final point of emphasis is the teaching of verse twenty. As far as the old law was concerned, Paul said he was dead (separated) from it. This was similar to his teaching regarding the Christian's relationship to the law as found in Romans 7:1-7. Paul showed that as a Christian he did not determine that his life would be for himself. He really did not consider his life to belong to himself. Once he had even said that dying would be better than living except for the good he could do for others (Philippians 1:23). His life was totally committed to the service of the Lord.

As Christians we live by faith, walk by faith, and our salvation is in the faith of Christ. The will of the Lord must be the heart and core of our thought and conduct. We are not to allow any motive except it please God. No word spoken should be outside His approval.

Alongside the condemnation of racial prejudice, let us be aware that if stalwart soldiers of the cross like Peter and Barnabas can get sidetracked into error, improperly influencing others, we certainly can. Let us be consistent, but more importantly, be right. Paul rendered the church great service when he rebuked Peter.



## **Seven Complete Volumes**

With this issue we have published eighty-four issues of **A Burning Fire**. This amounts to seven volumes of twelve issues each. Someone has suggested that a task undertaken might never have been begun if only we knew how much was really involved in doing it. While we had some idea what would be required to produce all my sermons in printed form over a period of several years, it would be fair to say that it surely has involved much more than at first realized. Not only has it demanded a great deal of time, money, energy and considerable patience, it has occupied the attention of my wife and I far more than we really intended to give it.

But there has been tremendous satisfaction for these efforts seeing the encouragement and response that we have received from so many. Our distribution is necessarily limited because of resources available for this work, but we are confident much good is being done relative to the work we have done. With prospective issues numbering about one hundred twenty five more, we just hope that things will continue to be such that someday all my sermons will be in printed form.

\* \* \* \* \*

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