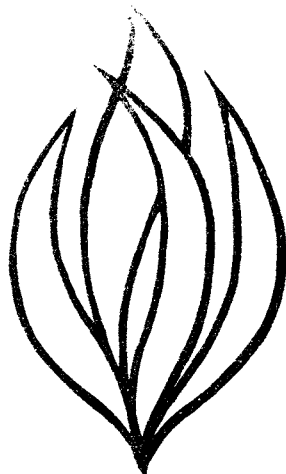


# A Burning Fire



"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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**Trivializing Christ**

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# ***Doing Good Unto Others***

The reading of James 2:14-26 should be completed before studying this lesson further. This is the text from which the thoughts are motivated and derived.

We often hear it said that it is better to see a sermon than to hear one. This simply means that good words are well and fine, but words apart from works are nothing. Matthew 5:16 teaches us to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, like a city set on a hill. Our influence is to radiate all around to the glory of the Father. Our deeds are to bring glory to Him. But to fulfill our mission we must be examples before others, not only in saying what ought to be said but also in doing what ought to be done.

It is a sad reality that many of us who profess to be Christians do not practice our faith very diligently. Christ found many people like that during His personal ministry and employed scathing language in condemning their hypocrisy (Matthew 23). While we may accept as truth that we are to be the followers of Christ in order to enter heaven, are we convinced that this involves adding works to our words? Can one be a true follower of the Lord as we are taught to be (First Peter 1:22) unless he DOES like Christ as well as TALK like Christ? Luke said he recorded what Jesus began both to DO and TEACH (Acts 1:1). With these introductory thoughts before us, let us make application of them in the realm of benevolence and doing good unto others.

## **Definition**

We can define the attitude of benevolence as a disposition to do good. Certainly Jesus was a benevolent person. Acts 10:38, *"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him."* Could any except a benevolent person teach such a lesson as that of the good Samaritan where failure to assist those in need was condemned and lifting up the fallen was commended?

It was Jesus who showed God's blessings to be upon those who rendered assistance to the needy in Matthew 25:35,36. In the same passage Jesus revealed God's wrath against those who failed to do the same merciful works. Do not His miracles of

mercy, compassion, healing, helping, His words of sympathy alongside His deeds of relief reveal a benevolent Master?

### **In Every Dispensation**

Let us be impressed that benevolence is one of the God-given injunctions that transgress dispensational lines. Abraham in the Patriarchal Age was kindly toward others. The Jews under the Mosaic Age were commanded to be benevolent. In both Old and New Testaments this is a repeated theme. Leviticus 25:35, *"And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him; yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee."* Psalm 140:12, *"I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and the right of the poor."* Psalm 146:9, *"The Lord preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow; but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down."* God is described as *"the father of the fatherless"* (Psalm 68:5), and *"the refuge of the poor"* (Psalm 14:6). Zechariah 7:9,10, *"Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassion every man unto his brother; and oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart."*

David wrote, *"Blessed is he that considereth the poor."* (Psalm 14:1). The wise man Solomon said that the show of mercy is a way to happiness (Proverbs 14:21). Furthermore, not only do we have positive pronouncements urging benevolence, but expressions of curses against those who refuse benevolence. Deuteronomy 27:19, *"Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow..."* Exodus 22:22-24, *"Ye shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless."* Surely, as we observe God's attitude toward those of the past who were or were not benevolent, plus the recognition of the benevolent attitude and action of Jesus, we should be sufficiently motivated to be benevolent.

### **Our Duty**

Why are not people more active in benevolence? We suggest four reasons that may apply to many of us. First, we are not

sufficiently aware that such work is our responsibility. Did you ever see the phrase, "I am third?" It abbreviate the priorities of God first, others second and "I am third." But there are times when "I" should head the list. When we think of responsibility toward those in need, too many of us are willing to let others be involved while we do nothing. We have individual and collective duties in this area. When Christ rules and reigns in the heart we shall go about doing good toward others as a duty belonging to us, not just others, the church, the government, or somebody else before ourselves. The old adage that "charity begins at home" is very relevant.

### **Small Things**

Second, possibly we wait until we think we can do some great thing. Little efforts do not bring recognition and praise like big things do, so we wait until we can make a big splash. Naaman almost missed his chance for healing because the command given him called for humility and obedience. *"If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing wouldest thou not have done it?"*

The "big" things are nothing more than combinations of many little things and each is important. Your best, standing alone, may not appear too significant, but your best, with my best, and the best of others will accomplish what needs to be done. We must be sure we do our part. Even a charitable cup of cold water does not go without the Lord's notice.

### **Opportunities**

Third, we do not always recognize our opportunities for doing good. There is the story of a woman of relatively meager means who heard over the radio about a family whose house burned. She called the station and got the name and location and made contact, taking with her some small baked goods by which she wished to show kindness and sympathy. This Christian lady was later influential in bringing that entire family to salvation in Christ. She could have said it was not her business. The Red Cross or someone else will provide. She could have said she did not have much to give and done nothing. She could have done as many members of the church do, call the preacher or elders and dismissed it. Some seem to think that mere notifying the preacher or elders ends their work. But she saw her opportunity, seized it, did what she could, and the ultimate results were

glorious. When we have a benevolent heart we look for opportunities to do good works toward others.

### **Sharing**

Fourth, the reason some of us do so little in benevolence is because we are unwilling to share, sacrifice, and deprive ourselves for the benefit of others. We are selfish. I am persuaded that many who have opposed ways and means of helping the needy are basically selfish, looking for some "scriptural" way to do nothing. But can we afford to fare sumptuously every day without trying to help others (First John 3:17)? This is a grave problem of our nation. We live in a land of plenty, and we can be glad that our nation has probably been the most benevolent nation in history. I am confident this is part of the reason for our own prosperity. But we have so much relatively. We live in a land of abundance, dieting, food surpluses, while much of the world starves. I know there are many contributing factors to this condition, but never let it be because we lack compassion and do not seek to help.

Are you cold, hungry, naked? Do not most of us have ample supply? This is not evil to have adequacy, or even abundance. But should we think that all of our desires must be met without giving thought to those whose basic necessities are not met?

Human suffering and need is real and widespread. We know the primary work of the church is not to provide the world's breadbasket. But a part of our faith requires work as well as word. Many suffer because of their own sins, but it is also true that they are in need. Many innocent people suffer and lack. Children are to be pitied and helped. Whatever be the cause that provoked the hardship, as we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men. This especially should be done for those of the household of faith (Galatians 6:10).

### **Restoration**

As we restore New Testament Christianity, let us restore in the heart this benevolent word and work. Why should others be know for having more compassion for the needy than the Lord's church? In Acts four there were none that lacked because brethren were benevolent. First Corinthians sixteen shows the brethren were instructed to lay by for the relief of others. Second Corinthians eight teaches the churches of Macedonia were

commended for their giving even as they were in deep poverty themselves. Acts twenty-two, the Antioch church determined to send relief to brethren in Judea. Did not Jesus teach, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive?"* (Acts 20:35). Consider the texts of Romans 12:20, James 1:27, Luke 3:11, and possibly our attitudes will be brought more in line with that which pleases God. The New Testament message includes benevolence.

We can afford to be merciful because we have received mercy. As has been said, "There, but for the grace of God, I go," when we see another in need. We have been blessed in order to bless others. As we have been forgiven of sins, surely, we can show kindness to those in distress. Saying, "Lord, Lord," will not suffice. Let us show our faith by our works, glorify God by our good deeds, tell God we are thankful and appreciative by sharing our blessings benevolently with those who are not as fortunate. Is not this, too, a part of being like Christ? We are persuaded it is.

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## ***The Church in Antioch of Syria***

Christians work together in building the Lord's church and causing it to grow and prosper in those things for which it was established. But in doing this work we are expected to follow the Lord's pattern. We are not involved in building some religious order. Our concern is for Christ, His church, and the salvation of souls. This church was established on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the Scriptures this church is revealed to us. We read of many congregations, their successes, problems, setbacks and history. We can learn and profit from what is told about them. Our lesson is intended to call attention to five characteristics of the church in Antioch of Syria, not only because of our interest in that church and the early church generally, but to learn more of that by which we are to be guided today in promoting the cause of Christ.

## **By the Word**

The church was established by the preaching of the Word. Acts 11:19-21, *"Now when they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but the Jews only. And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord."*

When the gospel is preached, heard, believed and obeyed, nothing is produced except the church of Christ. People went forward *"preaching the word... preaching the Lord Jesus."* Great numbers heard, believed and obeyed. *"Much people was added unto the Lord."* (Verse 24). Preaching the Word of God never produces denominations, but only the Lord's church. Secular history informs us that possibly as many as five to ten thousand people became members of the church. This was the church where Paul and Barnabas worked together for a whole year (Verse 26). This was the place where *"the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."* (Verse 26). This was a congregation that included both Jews and Gentiles (Verses 19, 20). This was a notable New Testament church.

## **Benevolence**

The church was a benevolent minded church. Acts 11:27-30, *"And in those days came prophets from Jerusalem to Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be a great dearth throughout all the world; which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar, Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea, which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul."*

When it was learned that Jewish brethren were in physical need, Antioch, which had received spiritual help from Judea, now had opportunity to return the favor. Each one gave as they could, and Paul and Barnabas took what was given to the elders of Jerusalem who obviously took the oversight of its distribution.

For a church today to be like this first century church there must be the attitude and action of benevolence toward the



needy. So often this phase of the work of the church is neglected. Realizing that it is not the primary thrust of the work of the church, it is nonetheless an important manifestation of the spirit of Christ to do good. *"As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."* (Galatians 6:10). First John 3:17, 18, *"But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth."*

It is most unfortunate that some have created grave problems for the church over how benevolent work is to be done. They have divided churches, making laws where God has made none, and imposing their self-made restrictions and demanding everyone conform to their opinion. God has commanded certain work to be done. Sometimes He has also commanded how the work is to be done. When that is the case both the work and the method are binding upon us. But when God has commanded a work but has not specified how it is to be done, then we are at liberty to exercise our own judgment in methods used. There is room for opinions, and none should be so contentious about their own opinion that they would create strife among brethren over it. Much benevolent work demands the exercise of human judgment as we must do the best we can. The eldership of the local congregation has the duty and authority to decide what is best for that congregation. Unless the church is practicing *"pure and undefiled religion"* (James 1:27), how can it be pleasing to God? There are several methods for doing this, but the fact remains that it must be done.

### **Preached the Word**

The Antioch church was also mission minded, by which we mean they were concerned about sending the gospel around the world to the lost. Acts 14:25-27, *"And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia, and thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God has done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. And they abode long time with the disciples."*

No church can fulfill its purpose for existence without working

to spread the gospel message. This is the primary work of the church. It is to be regretted that many congregations today do not do this phase of the work as extensively as they are capable because they have sidetracked themselves into recreation, secular education, social activities, playground provisions, and other irrelevant matters. One main reason for having a strong local church is so that church can and will take the gospel elsewhere, near and far. Churches that "keep house" or major in minors, providing trivia, have missed the mark.

There is no separation from evangelizing the world and preaching the gospel. Antioch was once a mission field with no church. Preaching brought it into existence. Winning lost souls became the purpose for its existence. First Timothy 3:15, "...which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." The church is not simply for association, as some kind of club, but we have been saved to save. For churches to involve themselves in unauthorized activities and simply cater to the satisfaction of their own happiness and "good times" is to display a lack of concern and misunderstanding of the reason the Lord Jesus died on the cross and shed His blood by which the church was purchased.

### **Building Itself**

Antioch was a church that was concerned for itself with emphasis on teaching and edification of itself, building itself in knowledge and spiritual strength. Becoming a Christian is essential but it is just the beginning. Being a Christian must follow thereafter. Faithfulness is required of the child of God. The church that does not grow spiritually in grace and knowledge of Christ (First Peter 3:18) will soon be lost to the cause of Christ.

Antioch had an impressive number of teachers. They were not a mere "staff" to provide fun and games for the members as we so often see today. Acts 13:1, "*Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers, as Barnabas, and Simeon, that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.*" Acts 15:35, "*Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.*"

There was no such thing as a clergy-laity in Antioch. They did not have the professional staff. Every Christian was a servant of

Christ and busied themselves to teach others and one another. The religion of Christ is a taught religion (John 6:44,45) and the church is an educational institution to teach the will of the Lord. Any church neglecting its teaching program invites weakness, which is a forerunner to digression and apostasy. Nobody can lead a church astray where its members know the will of the Lord. Somewhere along the line of history Antioch fell away and no church exists there today that is faithful to God and patterned after the New Testament church. The failure of edification is at the root of such tragedies.

Churches grow strong and remain strong by good strong and diligent teaching. First Thessalonians 5:11, *"Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do."* Every member should lend his support to every effort made in this realm of the work of the church.

### **Opposing Error**

The Antioch church was determined to stand for the truth. They were zealous for and jealous of the truth. Error was not tolerated to pollute the congregation, at least at this time. Problems arose in the church due to false teaching from some who came from Jerusalem who taught that it was necessary to continue to obey certain commands peculiar to the law of Moses (Acts 15:1). This caused no small stir when Paul and others withstood these teachers. Galatians 2 shows how even Peter and Barnabas were carried away temporarily with such teaching. Knowing that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump (First Corinthians 5:6), Paul would not surrender the truth and the church did not shy away from facing the issue until the proper solution was reached.

They could have said, as some do even today when problems arise, "Leave it alone and it will go away. We don't want to hurt anybody's feelings. Let's keep the peace and create no strife." But they loved the Lord, His church, the truth, the lost and saved enough to realize that error does not just "go away." They wanted peace but not at the price of compromising truth. They knew that peace and unity can only be enjoyed when truth is upheld among faithful brethren. It is to the credit of the church in Antioch that they met the problems and defeated them with a hearty application of the truth. So must we do today.

In summary, the five great qualities of the church in Antioch were: (1) It was founded by the preaching of the gospel; (2) It

was benevolent minded; (3) It was busy spreading the gospel elsewhere; (4) It was strong through edifying itself; (5) It withstood error and stood for the truth. Here is a Biblical demonstration of what a local church should be and do. This is the goal and continued purpose for every local congregation. God wants it that way and we must work earnestly that it be that way. By doing so, God will be glorified, souls will be saved, including our own.

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## ***Truth: Is It Changeable and Variable?***

There is a rather widely held view regarding truth that is called progressive revelation. It contends that truth is not absolute and objective, but relative and subjective. What may have been true religiously and morally in the past is not necessarily true now. There is no body of eternal and unchanging truth. What may be true for people in one part of the world is not true for others. Truth varies and changes according to circumstances. So goes this position.

Those who hold to this progressive revelation philosophy consider those who hold to a definite and unchanging standard of truth as antiquated, old-fashioned, and certainly not of our time. For anyone to think that religious truth was established nearly twenty centuries ago and is still the standard today is to them unthinkable.

An example of this progressive revelation concept in religion is an event in New York when one Sunday the clergyman, finding attendance rather sparse in winter months due to weather and sparse in summer months due to vacations, changed the Lord's Day worship to Wednesday because nearly everybody was then in town and might attend. There are much worse examples in this era of "do your own thing as you think or feel." There being no right or wrong anymore, whatever anyone prefers becomes their personal standard and God is to accept it whatever it is, especially if it is done honestly and sincerely.

## **The Enduring Word**

As we consider modern man's progressive revelation idea, aside from those who claim God is still speaking to them with special messages that others never hear, there are pertinent Scriptures that should be read. Proverbs 14:12, *"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."* John 17:17, *"Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth."* Matthew 24:35, *"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."* First Peter 1:24,25, *"For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."* Second Timothy 3:16, 17 affirms the infallibility, inerrancy, inspiration, authority and sufficiency of the Scriptures and allows for nothing more or less. Multiplied passages can be added and though much can be said of each one it is certain that their theme contradicts the progressive revelation concept. We shall be judged by the word of Christ (John 12:48) and the apostles were guided into all the truth (John 16:13). The faith has been "once" delivered (Jude 3) and Peter said "all things" pertaining to life and godliness had been given (Second Peter 1:3). There is no compatibility between the Biblical teaching and progressive revelation presently advocated by some.

## **Universal**

God has two kinds of law; natural or physical and spiritual or moral. We can learn much about God's moral laws by studying His physical and natural laws. Let me explain. God's physical laws are universal, applying the same to all people, for all time, wherever they are on earth. The law of gravity is just as real today as in the days of Pharaoh. It applies in America and Africa, whether day or night. The same is true regarding the laws of mathematics, chemistry, etc. The point is sufficiently made, God's laws, rightly understood, have not changed. Therefore, we are not too surprised to find a universal, all-encompassing standard in His spiritual and moral laws.

## **Narrow**

Even though many dislike it, the fact remains that truth is

narrow. Many religionists have tried to expand it and have labeled all who are willing to accept God's standards as they exist as bigoted, narrow, less than educated, and something undesirable. The way to heaven remains strait and narrow (Matthew 7:13,14) regardless of the attitudes of people concerning it. People do not change God's laws.

People generally do not really object to the narrowness of correctness. They wish they could do as they please and think if they will it so it is so. Suppose you wish, however, to dial a telephone number. Are you at liberty to dial whatever you feel is correct, in whatever order you might prefer? We have a new long distance system that is supposed to save money, and it does. But we have to dial about twelve consecutive numbers, being precise with each one, and in proper order, to reach the desired place. Nobody really complains, but all understand. We know truth is narrow. This is but a trivial example.

### **Dispensations**

Before we are too hasty, we must admit there has been a change in God's way of dealing with man. Depending upon the dispensation involved the principle may remain steady but the specific ordinances have changed. Under the patriarchs some things were done, commanded and allowed that were forbidden the Israelite under the law of Moses. There is even more change for those of us who live this side of the cross and who are subject to Christ. But these changes are of God, designed of God, revealed by God. What we are considering is whether there have been changes in truth since the will of Christ became operative with the establishment of His kingdom on Pentecost after His ascension. Let us consider a few matters and the points can be extended to almost infinity.

Has the Lord changed His will regarding profanity since the will of Christ began? Under the Mosaic Law profanity of God's name was prohibited (Exodus 20:7). In the new covenant this same teaching is included (Matthew 5:34-37). We are not to speak profanely, not because of the authority of the Law of Moses but because of the authority of Christ. Ephesians 4:29, *"Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth..."*

While modern man is hardly known for keeping his word, lying is in vogue if thought expedient, and cursing and profanity commonplace, where is there any Biblical evidence God has changed His mind about it?

Under the Ten Commandments lying was forbidden (Exodus 20:16). Those under Christ are also taught, Ephesians 4:25, *"Therefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor..."* Liars shall be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (Revelation 21:8). Modern man offers all kinds of explanations for his deceptions and lies, but is that divine evidence that the truth on the matter has changed? The practice does not determine the standard. The standard should govern the practice. Here is where many go astray in their thinking.

### **Still No Change**

*"Thou shalt not steal,"* (Exodus 20:5) is another Old Testament command taken into the law of Christ (Ephesians 4:28). People tend to think shoplifting is not stealing but only a disease. Taking what belongs to another without permission remains theft. To excuse oneself with rationalizations that you have not been treated fairly, that others are richer than you, that it will never really be missed, does not diminish the sin of stealing. The embezzler may intend to "pay it back someday," but he is stealing. Cheating is stealing. God's laws have not changed just because more and more people have seared their consciences regarding right and wrong.

This same thing is true regarding fornication, adultery, and all manner of sexual perversity. Fornication is a broad term that includes even lesbianism, bestiality, homosexuality, as well as sexual intercourse between those who are not married to each other. The claim that these sexual drives are natural, and some quite unnatural, is no excuse for defying God's law. God knows of these drives, and God has regulated them and provided for their satisfaction in the framework of honorable marriage. Nobody will ever find God's "progressive revelation" that allows for this "new morality" binge upon which so many have embarked. To attempt to excuse it is an attempt to justify sin.

In no area has this progressive revelation attitude been more evident than in the attitudes and doctrines concerning marriage, divorce and remarriage. Matthew 19:9 and 5:32 still allow only one cause for divorce, and that is fornication. God's law does not smile upon divorce but contends marriage is for life. Some seem to think they can divorce for just any cause provided they do not remarry. This is wrong, wrong, wrong. Furthermore, God's will does not allow the fornicator the right of remarriage. Regardless of the many causes for divorce the state may permit,

or even the permissive legality that does not even call for a cause, God's law is unalterable and the will of Christ remains the same as always.

### **Source of Truth**

There really ought not be a difficulty for any of us to fathom the point this lesson makes. To learn the truth, consult God's Word. Whatever is not harmonious thereto is wrong before God. What is true now has been true since the Holy Spirit had Scripture to be written. It is the same truth under which future generations, if they exist, must also live and give answer before God. Man is not left to chart his course without God.

Some say, "I am keeping the spirit of the law if not the letter."

How can one even learn the spirit of a law without the letter of it? Who has the right to dismiss the letter and declare the spirit to contradict the letter? Obedience is what is expected, not explanations for why you think you can disobey acceptably. To contend one is obeying the spirit but not the letter is to admit disobedience. Obedience requires doing the right thing with the right motive in the right way. When Uzzah reached out and touched the ark he could have claimed a good spirit. But he was struck dead. When the Pharisees prayed they claimed the right action but the spirit was impure. It takes both to be right before God. When Paul was talking about the letter and spirit he was talking about the old Mosaic Law in contrast to the law of Christ. He was not giving a "out" for failing to obey what the Lord commanded under the guise of obedience in spirit.

### **God's Rule**

What would you think of players in a game who changed the rule to accomodate themselves as the game progressed? Could the game be played at all? Only when all participants subscribe to the same standard can there be any order or reason to what is done. The same principle stands in matters religious. It is not what do we want, what do we like, what are most doing, how pleasing is it to us, nor anything of this kind. All that matter is, "What does God teach us in His Word?"

God's laws are neither out-of-date nor irrelevant to our day. They have not changed since delivered through inspired men of the new covenant. Christ is the authority and total authority, now and until He returns and the end of all things. This attitude



of progressive, subjective, alternative, varying, changing revelation is of the devil and we must recognize it as Satan's deception to destroy the souls of unwary people.

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## ***Important Matters to Those Out of Christ***

The hour of worship is particularly important to the Christian because this is his worship to God. But it can also be of great importance to those who are not Christians because during these worship periods the Word of God is taught. Alongside our singing, praying, giving and partaking of the Lord's Supper, truth is presented that relates not only to the Christian and how he must live, but also information from the Bible regarding the condition of those who are out of Christ and what they must do to be saved from sin. Usually there are several present in a worship assembly who have not yet responded to the Lord's invitation and have not obeyed the gospel. There are young people who need to be taught the way of the Lord. Many have friends and relatives who need to be taught how to become Christians.

This lesson can be of special concern to those who are not Christians, but also to Christians who want to reach the hearts of the lost. This is primarily addressed to those not yet in spiritual fellowship with Christ. It is not an attempt to simply condemn one in his present state because God has already warned of that state. But the lesson is presented in the hope that those who have not yet come to Christ will hasten to do so before opportunity for salvation escapes them.

### **The Need**

You first must realize you need to be saved. Many prefer to think this is not the case. Paul said, Romans 3:10, "*There is none righteous, no, not one.*" Romans 3:23, "*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*" Isaiah 59:1,2,

*"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy that he cannot hear; but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."*

Sin makes one unclean, impure, spiritually defiled and unfit for heaven. No uncleanness shall enter heaven (Revelation 21:27). Only those whose names are in the book of life shall enter therein.

Probably there are few people, if any, that would profess to be perfect and without sin. Those who would so claim make a grave error and only compound their sin by so claiming. But many feel they are not "bad sinners" and that sin does not really have an effect on them. We all must realize that none of us can be righteous enough to earn nor merit God's gift of salvation. That is what salvation is; a gift from God (Ephesians 2:8,9). We all stand in need of someone to save us from sin. Christians have already recognized that need and have surrendered to that One who can save. It is those who are out of Christ who need to be saved and that means they must accept the reality of their sinful state. If one believes what the Bible teaches he will not quibble over this important point but will readily acknowledge as others have, *"I have sinned."* In sin there is no salvation. Only in Christ is there salvation.

### **God's Provision**

Thankfully, God has provided for salvation. John 3:16, *"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."* Romans 5:8, *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* Man cannot save himself by himself, and God knows that. He gave the way of salvation which is Jesus Christ. Why did He do this? It was because of His love for mankind even as a sinner. Jesus said, John 15:13, *"Greater love hath no man than to lay down his life for his friend."* Yet, Jesus went a step beyond to lay down His life for those who were still alienated from God and not His friends.

Jesus Christ is the only way God has or will provide (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). This was the mission of Christ, to save sinners (First Timothy 1:15). We all have sinned, but the gift of salvation is by Christ (Romans 5:12,15). That God has provided for sinful mankind at all is a marvel above marvels. Man could never be

worthy of what God has done for him. We can only be grateful and humbly submissive that God has paved the way because He loved us as precious, immortal souls.

Realizing the need of salvation and knowing Christ is the way of salvation does not mean everyone will be saved. For one to be saved he must come to Christ. He must accept Christ. We hear people being urged to "accept Christ" over and over, but few seem to understand what this involves. We do not read of people being told to simply receive Christ as personal Savior, raise hands if you want to be saved, sign a card, or send us your name (usually with a contribution) if you want us to pray for your salvation, pray for the Holy Spirit to come on you, and other such admonitions that the world hears from the multitude of false teachers. These "ways to accept Christ" are human doctrines and can avail nothing to the spiritual benefit of the soul. One cannot believe everything he hears.

## **Obedience**

One major point that so many people ignore is the absolute necessity of obedience to the will of the Lord in order to be forgiven of sin. Hebrews 5:9, *"He (Christ, JWB) became the author of salvation to them that obey him."* We show our love by obedience (John 14:15). We show our friendship by obedience (John 15:14). Unless we obey what He has commanded by what right do we claim to possess the forgiveness of sin?

People on Pentecost asked what they had to do to be saved and were told what to do. Peter emphasized, *"Save yourselves..."* (Acts 2:40), meaning there was their part in God's plan for their salvation. God had done His part in providing Christ, His life, death, resurrection and ascension. Man has something to do also (Matthew 7:21). We must search the Scriptures to learn what it is we are commanded to do, when to do it, and know that when we obey we can know we are saved because God is true to His Word. Until we obey we can be just as sure that we remain lost.

## **Hear**

The New Testament teaches we must hear the gospel. This is why the gospel must be preached (Mark 16:15,16). The gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16). We are

saved by the word (James 1:21). Nobody can be saved without hearing the truth (Romans 10:14). Those that come to God are drawn to God (John 6:44). The next verse teaches how we are drawn. *"It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me."* Those that come must hear, be taught and learn. There is no salvation apart from the Word. Truth makes us free (John 8:32), and God's Word is truth (John 17:17). We would not even know we were lost or that we cannot save ourselves or that God has provided a Savior except the Word so informs us.

### **Believe**

Next, we must believe the Word. John explained why he wrote the book of John. John 20:30,31, *"And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life in his name."* We cannot please God without faith (Hebrews 11:6). John 8:24, *"For if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."* Our faith is in Christ as the Son of God. Repeatedly the Scriptures teach salvation by faith. Nobody that believes the message of truth denies that salvation is by faith. Unfortunately, some have added the word "only" or "alone" to the passages where God has not added them and have taught salvation by faith alone or faith only. Never does Scripture teach this and nobody that teaches the truth teaches it.

### **Repent**

We must also repent of our sins. This means to turn, turn from sin to Christ. It involves a change of heart or mind. You must resolve to change course. Failure to make such a resolution, which is prompted by God's love for us and by our godly sorrow for sins, is to lock us into the lost state. Repentance is commanded of everyone (Acts 17:30). It was the first command Peter gave to believers on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38). All must come to repentance (Second Peter 3:9). Search these passages and learn. The necessity of repentance is taught in Luke 13:3. Without it salvation is impossible.

### **Confess**

But we also must confess our faith in Christ. "*With the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*" (Romans 10:10). As Peter confessed, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God,*" (Matthew 16:16), so must we make a similar confession. The Ethiopian made this confession before he finished his obedience (Acts 8:37).

We are never taught to confess we are already saved. We are not taught to declare some "experience." Men invent emotional responses and lead people into them but these do not render obedience to God. We simply confess the truth regarding Christ, the foundation upon which the church is built, the Deity of Christ as the Son of God.

## **Baptism**

Before one is counted as a member of God's family, one of the saved, the church (Acts 2:47), he must be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27). We are baptized into His death (Romans 6:3,4) where His blood was shed (John 19:34). Here is where the sinner comes in contact spiritually with the saving blood of Christ by which one is justified (Romans 5:9).

Baptism is "in order to" the remission of sins. It is the way sins are washed away (Acts 22:16). Nobody who teaches truth teaches that the power of salvation is the water itself. But nobody who teaches the truth will dismiss baptism being involved in salvation (First Peter 3:21). It is not a question whether we are saved by faith, or by His blood, or by His grace, etc. But WHEN are we saved by these things? It is when we have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine the Romans had already obeyed (Romans 6:16-18). Being buried in baptism, they were raised to newness of life. They, like the Corinthians, became new creatures in Christ (Second Corinthians 5:17). They were "*born again,*" (John 3:3,5). Why religious teachers strain themselves out of joint to avoid doing what the Bible so plainly commands is beyond comprehension except they prefer to be saved their way rather than the simple way God has provided.

Having been baptized, is there anything more to enter heaven? Indeed, there is. Being baptized means you have been "*added*" to the church (Acts 2:47), which is the company of the saved. It means you are "*in Christ*" (Galatians 3:27). Your past sins are forgiven and you are now a child of God.

## **Faithfulness**

But God expects His children to live as His children in faithfulness (Revelation 2:10). *"Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life."* Loyal, faithful, worshipful service is involved in living the life in a Christlike fashion.

Having been born into His family, nothing more needs to be done to be born. But a life is to be lived to remain one of God's heirs (Romans 8:17). Laborers in His vineyard, servants of the Master, soldiers of the cross, whatever way you wish to define the way of a Christian, this is a lifetime profession and necessary to go to heaven. You never outgrow your need of fellowship with Christ, and you retain that fellowship by walking in the light as He is in the light (First John 1:7).

Those outside of Christ should consider these matters. If they will seriously consider the alternative, eternal condemnation and separation from God in hell, they will be additionally motivated to do their part as God has prescribed it. God wants all to be saved. But only those who do His will have His promise of salvation.

† † † † †

## **What Is Sin?**

Whether people realize it or not, admit it or not, one of the most urgent needs is the sense of the reality of sin. Many have lost that awareness. Many behave as if sin does not exist. The reason some are so insensitive to the reality of sin may be explained as follows: "If you laid a heavy burden on a corpse it would not feel the load because it was dead and insensitive to realities." This is why some do not recognize sin for what it is nor feel the weight and burden of it. One denominational leader said over television that sin was not in the vocabulary of their denomination anymore.

The tendency of our time is to deny the reality of sin, or soften it and explain it away until nobody really gives it much concern. Sin is referred to as merely a mistake, an error, an affair, poor judgment, ill behavior, anti-social activity, a disease,

anything and everything except what the Bible calls it. Too often labels deceive. To soften a label and make the contents of a bottle of poison less dangerous is vicious. You may put a label on a bottle that says "oil of vitriol" and many will not be too careful with it. But you call that sulfuric acid and put the skull and crossbones warning of possible death on it, this will cause more concern. So it is with sin. No amount of whitewashing will ever change its blighting devastation.

What is sin? How does the Bible define it? The Lord does not leave us without an answer but has specified four definitions of it as well as giving examples of it and warnings against it alongside the condemning consequences of it.

### **Transgression**

First John 3:4, "*Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin is the transgression of the law.*" The law refers to God's law. Sin is lawlessness, a violation of God's authority. To transgress is to go beyond limits, overpass the bounds established by authority. Literally it means to miss the mark, step across lines which God has drawn (drawn for our own welfare). Second John 9 warns of sinning in such fashion by going beyond the boundaries of the doctrine of Christ. Too many, even some brethren, fail to realize the seriousness of being presumptuous and act without God's authority. Whether one commits something forbidden, or omits something commanded, or adds to or subtracts from the Word of God, it is sin. It exceeds, transgresses, crosses the will of God. This is true whether we are concerned with morality, worship, the work of the church, the plan of salvation, daily behavior, or anything else the Lord has revealed.

### **Violation of Conscience**

Romans 14:23, "*And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*" The word "faith" is used in different senses in Scripture. It can refer to the entire religion of Christ (Jude 3), our belief (Hebrews 11:6), or, as here, one's personal conviction, what he believes, without regard to whether his belief is true or false. This passage is misused at times to teach a truth taught elsewhere. While we are to be governed by the faith of Christ, His doctrine and religion, this passage is not declaring everything outside of

that body of teaching to be sin. Whether to build a one story or two story house for your family is not a matter of *"thus saith the Lord."* But it is not sinful to build either house. In this passage the word *"faith"* refers to one's personal convictions. It forbids the violation of conscience. Anything that you cannot do with a clear conscience is sinful for you to do, even if the thing is not sinful in and of itself. This is not to say that anything one thinks is right is necessarily right before God. It is to say that doing what contradicts what you believe to be right is dishonest to your convictions, is a violation of conscience, and ought not be done. It is not of *"faith."*

In this context Paul is discussing the eating of meat, a problem that arose among Jewish converts who had been taught that certain meats were *"unclean"* and not to be eaten, as taught in the Mosaic Law. Also, there was a problem about the meat of animals that had been offered to idols and whether eating that meat was paying homage to the idol. Paul taught there was nothing wrong with the meat (First Timothy 4:4). But, if one ate, thinking it was wrong, he was wrong for eating, not because there was anything sinful or contaminating about the meat, but because he was violating his convictions. If a person will bow before pressure to do what may be innocent, but he thinks it is sinful, he will bow before even sinful things under sufficient pressure. We must be honest to our convictions.

God gave man a conscience as a guide, but it is not an infallible guide. The conscience responds according to the way it is trained. We must train the conscience to be offended when the will of God is offended, and not be offended when things innocent before God are done.

It is worth mentioning here that we ought to be careful about offending the consciences of others also and exercising our liberties and rights when they could lead another away from Christ. We should not allow our *"rights"* to be turned into *"wrongs"* by ignoring others and their consciences.

## **Unrighteousness**

A third definition of sin, First John 5:11, *"All unrighteousness is sin."* We can understand this by considering the opposite of unrighteousness, which is righteousness. Righteousness means doing right and being right by following the Lord's commands. To obey is righteousness and to disobey is unrighteousness.

We have several catalogs of sin in Scripture that specify some



of the violations by people (First Corinthians 6:9,10; Galatians 5:19-21). Hackneyed expressions such as "times have changed, we are only human, we live in a modern age, everybody's doing it" do not alter the commandments of God, either what He says is to be done, and what He says must never be done. All unrighteousness constitutes sin before God and those who sin are responsible and answerable for their sins.

### **Omission**

Finally, and this definition does give the serious Christian considerable concern because he wants to do right, James 4:17, *"To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* Did you know you can sin by doing nothing? We usually consider sin as doing something we ought not do, and this is included. But we are taught we can sin by not doing what we ought to do. Christianity is a way of daily life that imitates Christ. Wasted opportunities to serve God and man may be the major failing of many professed Christians. It was said of Jesus that He went about doing good (Acts 10:38). He is our example and we are to follow in His steps (First Peter 2:21,22). If He did good, shall not we? To not to do good is to sin.

I recall hearing one very mature and seasoned brother say that such sins as profanity, stealing, lying, various forms of immorality were not his major concern because he had learned to control himself and meet those temptations rather successfully, although he never let down his guard. But his concern was whether he was doing all he ought to do, or even coming close. This is not to say that we shall earn our way to heaven by our good works, but it is to say that we shall forfeit heaven if we stand before God without a record of good works. The sin of neglect is of concern to all dedicated Christians.

This definition applies to our work in spreading the gospel, edifying the saints, restoring the fallen, caring for the needy, faithfulness in worship, all the sides of Christianity that call for the doing of positive good. When one reads of the judgment scene in Matthew 25:41-46 he is made aware that those who were rejected were not accused of having done something wrong, but were accused of failing to have done something they should have done. Failure to discharge responsibility is sin.

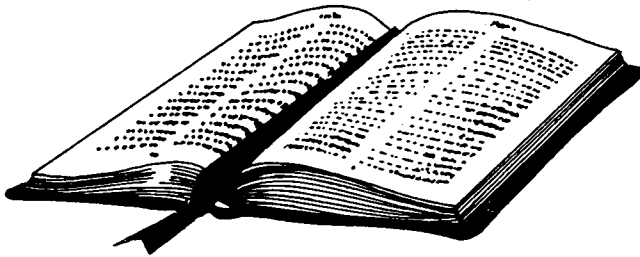
### **Result of Sin**

What can we say about the ultimate results of sin? Romans 6:23 and James 1:15 both teach that sin brings spiritual death, separation from God. Adam and Eve, while in Eden, lived in purity, beauty, happiness and in sinless fellowship with God. Later we see them driven out under the curse, doomed to die physically, and out of favor with God. What happened? Sin entered their lives.

Judas once sat at the Master's feet, being taught, given power to perform miracles, teaching others. Later we see him sneaking through the darkness of Jerusalem to return the betrayal coins, then onward where he hanged himself, his body later falling and being dashed to pieces. What happened? Sin had been allowed to enter his heart and he followed its lead to his destruction.

The prodigal son left home healthy, wealthy, but not very wise. Later he is hungry, in the pits for swine, friendless and wretched. What had happened? The answer given is the result of sin. Peter declared that even if all others forsook Christ he would die before he would do so. But we see him crying bitterly, having lied, cursed and sworn that he never knew Christ. We see the results of sin.

Over and over God's book tells us what we must know and realize. Let us therefore be aware of sin, recognize sin, know what God defines as sin, avoid sin, and when we do sin seek forgiveness of sin through the only Savior, Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son.



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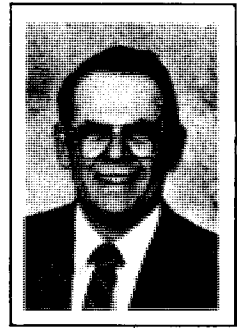
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## **Trivializing Jesus**

Many get upset when depraved movie producers misrepresent Christ, making Him an indecisive and totally human being, stripping Him of His Deity and showing Him as a trivial character. This disgust is justified. We have the same attitude toward blasphemous distortions of the Son of God.



**JAMES W. BOYD**

What strikes us as strange is how some can parade piously in objection to perverted films about Christ because His Deity is attacked but uphold so-called Bibles that openly, arrogantly and intentionally do the same thing, only worse, because these Bibles are misrepresented as being the Word of God. To attempt to make "*almah*" mean something less than virgin, to remove the designation of Jesus as "*the only begotten Son of God*" does injury to His claim of Deity. How some of these promoters of perverted Bibles, even among us, think they act consistently to speak out against a sinister film that undermines the identity of Christ but condone and encourage as reliable so-called Bibles that do the same thing is more than can be explained. Could it be that something other than conviction determines their actions? God knows!

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

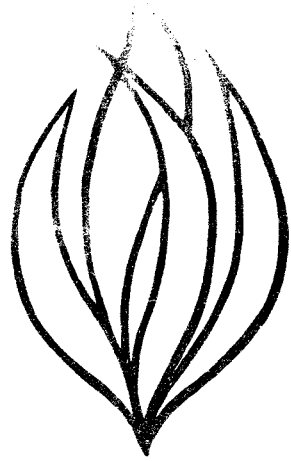
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# A Burning Fire



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

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# **Fear:**

## **A Prelude to Greatness**

Fear is often discussed in the Bible. The word is used two ways. It can have reference to respect, reverence and dutiful obedience. Solomon said, *"Fear God and keep his commandments."* It is also used with reference to a basic emotion known to man. It is defined by Webster as a painful emotion marked by alarm, dread and anxious concern. When one is fearful in this sense he is afraid, scared and disquieted. He has feelings of uncertainty, lacks self-confidence and assurance. He recognizes his need of assistance. It is this second sense upon which our study centers. Fear is an emotion common to people of every generation. It is so widespread, and so disturbing, that the general reaction to fear is negative, being looked upon as something undesirable and evil. But it is not always that way as we shall discover.

The chemical reaction of the physical body in times of fear is interesting. When frightened the adrenal glands pour adrenalin into the bloodstream profusely, much like putting high octane gasoline into the fuel line toward an engine. One becomes hyper-active. In a sense it "supercharges" a person, making him more active, stimulated, aroused and alert. Sometimes this increase of bodily activity is very noticeable. Other times, however, fear seems to almost paralyze a person to the extent they can neither move nor speak.

There is a type of fear called stage fright. Every preacher has experienced it and some of us always have it to some extent. But even that uncomfortable feeling provides extra power and energy needful for the task. It may even provide more than is needed, causing the hands to tremble, knees to wobble, the mouth to become dry and possibly the tongue to be extra active.

Sometimes the response to fear is very weakening. As one scared man explained, he wanted to run but could not. He wanted to shout but could not utter a sound. In any circumstance, most people usually associate fear with that which is at least a momentary unpleasantness.

**Not All Bad**

Why did God make man in such a way that he should feel fear? It is because all fear is not bad. Indeed, it is very worthwhile and can be used to provide for our safety and motivate us to the performance of tasks that otherwise we might not be able to do. Those who train speakers assure us that a certain amount of fear is helpful in speaking. We hear of "superhuman deeds" being done at times of emergencies, such as fires, when people have been known to lift and carry objects from a house that they otherwise were never able to move.

Nations are aroused to danger and threat through fear. Preparedness for emergencies can often be urged upon people when motivated by fear. Students may be led to do better preparatory work for their classes when the fear of expulsion, or the fear of not getting a job, is mentioned to them. It causes them to work harder. So we cannot demean all fear.

Fear has been used by the Lord and often has been a prelude or the beginning steps toward great accomplishments. Consider some Old Testament demonstrations of this.

### **Instances of Fear**

Hebrews 11:7 tells us that Noah was warned of God and "*moved with fear.*" Certainly Noah had respect for the Word of God. But who could doubt that a prediction of the overflowing of the entire world with water was not a frightening consideration? He was motivated to obedience in this way.

"*Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God*" when God called him from the burning bush. Because of fear, his sense of personal inadequacy, and offering one excuse after another why he should not do what God called him to do, he was humbled before God. It was the beginning steps of a life of immeasurable service to God.

Before Esther crowned herself with glory for saving Israel from annihilation at the instigation of Haman, she was possessed with fear. Mordecai told her to make a plea to the king for Israel. She was afraid to go before the king except at his request. If an appearance displeased him, it could mean death. But we know how she overcame this fear and acted.

There are several examples of fear before momentous events recorded in the New Testament. Consider Peter in Luke 5:3-11. Jesus was walking along the shore of the sea of Galilee. Some had fished all night and caught nothing. But when the Lord told them, "*Launch out into the deep,*" lower their nets once again,



they caught so many fish that the boat began to sink. Peter was astonished, so much so that Jesus had to reassure them by the words, "Fear not." This occurred immediately prior their leaving all and following Christ.

Earlier in Luke's record, 1:26-30, we read where fear came upon Mary, the mother of Jesus, just before the greatest of her works was about to begin. She had been chosen to bear the Son of God into the world in human form. This announcement struck fear in her heart.

So it was with the Philippian jailor at the earthquake when Paul and Silas were jailed in his prison (Acts 16:28,29). The experiences of that evening were frightening to him. Fear played a role in making him receptive to the gospel that was preached to him. He heard, believed and obeyed to the salvation of his soul. So we cannot discount the value and contribution that fear is capable of making, the humility it can bring, the inadequacy it can underline, the realization for help in time of need that it emphasizes. It softens the heart and makes it pliable.

### **Fear of Hell**

There is absolutely no doubt that the Lord's warning of hell strikes fear in the heart of any who hears it and has confidence in the Word of God. The Bible reveals to us death, both physical and spiritual. It tells us for the lake of fire and brimstone, eternal punishment. There is the warning of weeping and gnashing of teeth, separation from God, an eternal abode with the devil and his angels, the outer darkness. Who is so bold as to not have fear when he realizes there is such awaiting those who refuse to obey God? God uses fear as one of at least three motives for serving Him. The motive to receive reward is another. The response of love because God loved us is the noblest of the three. But fear does have a role.

The Bible is not written to scare people primarily. But this element is definitely therein. Many hardened people, faced with the reality of death and the prospect of an eternal hell have been moved to open the heart to the presentation of the loving message of salvation.

Fear has longed served a vital role in making people realize their inability to meet the great hereafter. It has made people see that they cannot save themselves and turn to seek the comfort of salvation that is provided only in Christ.

First John 4:18, *"There is no fear in love; but perfect love*

*casteth out fear; because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."* To consider one phrase: nobody questions that fear hath torment. We have all experienced it. The best and purest motive for serving God is responding to His love by loving Him in return. Such love is exemplified by obedience to His commands (First John 5:3). But many never consider the goodness and love of God until they are shaken by the fear of the consequences of sin. Fear has caused the alien sinner to weep. It has caused the fallen Christian to see the folly of his apostasy. It often provokes people to give the Word of God a fair hearing. Such is the very nature, purpose, intent and design of warnings. This is why we are warned.

### **Less Fear**

But as love for God grows, we become less and less fearful. Those who have genuinely matured do not fear death and the judgment as do others. They know, because of their obedience to His will and His faithfulness to His Word, that all is right between them and their Creator and Judge and they do not fear these unknown situations to the degree that most of us do. As that love grows, fear is disposed. One comes to so completely trust in God that he no longer is fearful.

We are convinced that any rational and reasonable person that believes the Word of God will have a certain fear of hell. If a person fears hell, that may well be the start toward salvation. For the first time in a person's life he may be willing to listen to the truth regarding himself and God.

Jude twenty-three speaks of saving some with fear, pulling them out of the fire. Many may be won to Christ by gentle persuasion. Others by the appeal of love. Jude urged even the use of fear as one means to save souls.

If there was power within me to create sufficient fear in the hearts of others to cause them to seriously consider the condition of their souls before God, you can be sure fear would be one of the instruments to be used. If fear can assist in snatching anyone from the fires of hell, we should use it. If the motive of love and reward will not touch the cords of the heart to favorably respond to God, and fear will do it, we should use it. If these appeals will not move people, there is no hope for their souls.

† † † † †

# ***The Dangers of Following Men***

Those familiar with the Bible know that Jesus Christ is the head of the Lord's church. Paul wrote that God "*raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*" (Ephesians 1:20-23).

Peter states we are to be followers of Christ, walking in His steps (First Peter 2:21). When Jesus called His apostles, He said, "*Follow me.*" (Matthew 4:19). His invitation to mankind is, "*Come unto me...*" (Matthew 11:28). Jesus Christ is our leader and guide in this life and there can be no other.

## **Use of Men**

Nonetheless, it is the will of Christ that men fill places of responsibility and leadership in the government of His church, His kingdom. He entrusted the revelation of the gospel to His ambassadors, the apostles, earthen vessels, as they were guided by the Holy Spirit. The organization of the church includes people other than the head and His apostles. Christ is the head of the church and Christians are the members of His spiritual body. Christians are congregated into local congregations which are overseen by a plurality of men of certain specified qualifications that are called elders, bishops or pastors. To assist them and the church as special servants are other men of special quality called deacons. Contrary to widespread thought and practice in the religious world, the New Testament does not authorize any organization of the church having universal oversight of the church. But each congregation is autonomous, self-governing, independent of others, not tied together by any kind of ecclesiastical hierarchy, but only by a mutual faith, hope, love, doctrine and practice.

Yet, there are these positions of labor that must necessarily be filled with men. In this sense, a limited extent, men become

leaders in the church and the rest of us are followers. They function with a limited and delegated authority, not as primary authority.

### **Most Are Followers**

Most people are followers regardless of the realm under consideration. Few are leaders. Many times, especially in the church, we find too many chiefs and not enough Indians. This usually produces strife and is a hindrance to the work. Some men are better qualified to lead than others. This is true in the church just as it is true in the business world, sports, civil government or other areas. But there are sometimes those men who feel they **MUST** be leaders, who so crave the distinction that goes with leadership, who strive and campaign to be leaders, qualified or not, that they set themselves as religious authority. The pope is an extreme example of this. But it is a similar wrong, as we heard in one congregation, when a brother stood one Lord's Day morning and announced before the congregation that from that day forward the church should look upon him as an elder. Needless to say, however, his term of service was short.

Julius Caesar said he had rather be first in a village than second in Rome. Some people love to have the preeminence that much. At times there are brethren who display the same attitude. They had rather be a leader even in some divisive faction than be a lowly servant for the whole church.

Third John nine speaks of the man named Diotrophes who was a church regulator, fond of first place, loving to have preeminence among his brethren. All we know of him is what we read in this passage. We do not know if he was an elder, preacher, deacon or something else. But we do know he wanted to be "church boss." Everything had to go his way, and if it did not he would not cooperate or participate. There is no concrete evidence that the issues involved regarding him were truth versus error or matters of doctrine, but the problem was his personal love of power. He even opposed the venerable apostle John. He would not receive brethren who were laborers with John. Obviously, he had a very exaggerated and exalted opinion of himself. He loved to have the preeminence and be leader of all, expecting all to follow him.

Some years ago I read of a Baptist author who wrote in a publication of that denomination about Diotrophes. He had no

specific person in mind, but was simply dealing with this "I-am-boss" attitude. Several wrote him blistering letters accusing him of making a personal attack on them. Some cancelled their subscription to his paper. Was that not a classic case of the hit dog howling? The shoe fit and they refused to wear it. The guilty conscience was quick to see its owner in such a setting.

The Lord's church does not need "leading brethren like Diotrophes." This growing practice of awarding plaques and awards to "super" brethren as the Christian of the Year, Soul-Winner of the Year, etc. is about as trashy and trite as brethren can get. Showing appreciation is one thing, but this takes things far beyond propriety. Who is anyone to so designate any other one as such? Do they know everybody and their labor for the Lord? What an appeal to vanity and a display of brotherhood politics! It is shameful and ought not so to be!

### **Who Is First?**

Jesus taught that first place was to those who serve the most (Mark 9:34). It belonged to those who received Him with a childlike faith (Luke 9:46-48). He further said, Luke 22:24-26, *"And there was strife also among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so; but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve."*

The mark of good leadership is not that men praise their human leader, but praise God whom they serve. John the Baptist was a preacher. People heard him, but they went not away praising John. They followed Christ (John 1:37). John said, *"He must increase, and I must decrease."* (John 3:30). Leaders should possess this attitude.

Unfortunately, at times personally ambitious people reach places of power, decision and influence in this world, even in the church. Dreadful and destructive things usually follow. While a great portion of blame belongs to the ambitious one, do not those who willingly follow such men also bear much blame? Some follow a man simply because the man is thought to be "somewhat," a big man, a big preacher, a high-up somebody. Too little attention is paid to what some men teach and practice. Because they are "big" many blindly accept whatever they say and do. They are impressed with a person's prominence and

notoriety regardless of what he is or for what he stands.

### **Word of Warning**

We send along a stern and serious warning to brethren. We warn against following men as if they were the masters. We warn against any man, however notable in the past or present, as if he possessed ultimate authority. We want to consider some of the dangers involved when brethren make the mistake of following men. Especially is this warning timely when all around us "leading brethren" profess to compose a "summit" when they gather for their deliberations, which are as often compromising sessions with denominational people and doctrines. We ask, "Who made such people a 'summit,' and who are they to assume such a distinction?"

The greatest danger in following men is to your own soul. You can be led astray from the truth by other people. God has revealed His truth to man through Christ, now embodied in His verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and sufficient Scriptures. All men have the opportunity to know the truth. Too often too few know the truth but this is no fault of God but the fault of men for failure to study the Word, or failure to preach the Word. When one does not know God's Word he can be easily led astray into a wide variety of religious errors by men he has raised to some pedestal. Romanists do what their priest tells them. Still others accept whatever some preacher says, especially if he is prominent, has some arbitrarily determined academic degree, or is widely known. We need to ask ourselves just what is the basis of our faith; men or God's Word.

We would not destroy justified confidence in faithful preachers and teachers. But we would not have any person simply follow any man however well informed he might seem to be. Jesus warned against the blind leading the blind and both falling into the pit (Matthew 15:14). Those who are not blind are those who are guided by the written Word, and subscribe thereto as the lamp unto their feet and light unto their path.

### **Blind Following the Blind**

If you follow men you will follow them into misdeeds. No human being does everything perfectly. None accomplished that except Christ. Being human, people falter, stumble, fall and digress. They often bring reproach on even the good things they

have done in the past. They are subject to being overtaken with a fault, such as jealousy, envy and other sins. When you follow men, even into good works, when they go astray even your good works are held in ridicule. Brethren have sometimes promoted worthy efforts, but when the leader of those efforts goes astray, as sometimes happens, brethren become confused, disillusioned, embarrassed and their work reduced to naught.

No human ever reaches the plane of infallibility. To follow mn

No human ever reaches the plane of infallibility. To follow man is to displace Christ from His rightful place. Which is the more important to you in a gospel meeting or a Bible class; the preacher who preaches or the message he preaches? Is it right to support the truth only when one you like is preaching but not other times? When the Lord Jesus is the leader of men, what right do we have to become followers of men who would place themselves as the leader?

True enough, Paul said, First Corinthians 11:1, "*Be ye followers of me.*" But he added, "*...even as I also am of Christ.*" Our eyes are on the Lord, not some man. We dare the devil to mislead us into apostasy and digression from the truth when we are content to simply let men guide us. We cannot prevent falling away unless we follow the One who never fell.

When you hear the truth, and you learn it, believe it because it comes from the Bible and you know it comes from the Bible, do not reject it simply because you may have learned it first from some man. Investigate what men tell you even as the noble Bereans did (Acts 17:11). Do not accept something as truth until you have determined its validity from Scripture. Following men is a risky adventure that cannot produce good. Following Christ is a certain adventure that cannot be wrong.

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### **Our Issues Are Not Dated**

For a number of reasons we do not put dates on our issues. However, it so happens that this one will be mailed in mid-November with the next to follow after the mail rush of Christmas holidays. You can expect a time gap between this issue and the next you receive. JWb

# ***The Man and the Plan***

It is often correctly stated that there are no two people exactly alike. Would it not be a monotonous world if we were all alike? It is true that we differ. Some are tall; others are shorter. Some are young; others are older. Some move very quickly while some are ever so slow. The differences are almost infinite in number. This is very obvious in the physical realm.

Of greater importance is the difference between people in the realm of their thinking, attitudes and views of life and temperaments. In matters of religion this is particularly true. There are many churches, many doctrines, many practices. Is it really important what we think, how we feel, what we do? These many differences among people only reflect the real spiritual differences. In this lesson let us notice one particular area where there is wide variance of thinking. It is an area where there truly ought to be unity. It has to do with the Christ, His person, and the doctrine which He authored. We are concerned with the preaching of Christ and the preaching of doctrine.

## **Person**

There are those who emphasize the person of Christ almost to the exclusion of everything else. They talk about the nature of Christ, His kind and gentle qualities, but they insist that we leave doctrine alone. Such people are often very pious, at least outwardly. They claim to be very spiritual. Often they are highly emotional, but not always is that true. There are times when they abandon revelation and reason and cast off self-control and talk about seeing the Lord Jesus in the flesh, talking with Him, having visions, hearing voices in the night, and similar claims. Some are heard to shout and wail, making a great spectacle of themselves, even though doubtless sincere.

It is tragic but true nonetheless that many people reflect no regard for the doctrine of Christ. They minimize the nature of the church and how to become a Christian. They seldom teach on the Biblical manner of worship or any other matter they consider "doctrinal." They contend that doctrine is of no consequence; that people can follow and believe whatever doctrine they choose with equal benefit so long as they are honest and sincere. They are heard to admonish others to



“preach Christ” and in their highly emotionalized feelings, they are not concerned even for what Christ has taught. One is reminded of the words of Jesus in Matthew 15:8,9, *“This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”* This shows that what is taught does matter. Doctrine is important. Doctrines of men in contrast to the doctrine of Christ is the difference between being approved and disapproved of God. So many have never realized this truth!

## **Doctrine**

But like pendulums on the clock, others swing to the opposite extreme. They so emphasize what they call “doctrine” that they seldom mention anything else. It is true that all teaching is doctrine. But what they mean by doctrine includes only such things as the plan of salvation, the organization of the church, the manner of worship, etc. They seldom preach about the person, Jesus Christ. To them the religion of Christ is nothing more than a set of rule, laws and a veritable checklist of do’s and don’t’s. Doctrine looms so large before them that they never concentrate on the character of Christ or the nature of His example before us. They act as if their faith is in a creed rather than a person.

This approach to the religion of Christ is just as one-sided as the first extreme. Such thinkers have not yet matured and know not the fulness and richness of being a follower of Jesus Christ. Their approach is threadbare. They talk as if they never heard of the grace of God, the cross, the resurrection. Listening to them one might get the impression that salvation is earned by keeping a set of rules and that alone. Have they forgotten that such passages as Ephesians 2:8,9 and Luke 17:10 are still in the Bible? Why should such teaching be minimized?

The result of such extremes is destructive to the spread of the truth regarding Christ and His Word. Those who emphasize Jesus and ignore His doctrine look at their religious friends as “legalists,” while those that speak only of “doctrine” and never the person, Jesus Christ, consider their religious friends as soft and liberal. Each group is pushed further and further apart and into their unique extremes.

## **Person and Doctrine**

The truth is that the religion of Christ includes both person and doctrine. It is not either Christ or doctrine. If we preach and practice that which God sent into the world we will preach Christ and His doctrine. In fact, there is no separation between them. Why should anyone want to separate the Lord from His Word? We should maintain the balance in presentation of the truth as the Scripture does and preach the whole counsel of God.

Christ is the founder and the very heart of Christianity. The whole of man's service to God relates to Him. He is the central personality of the entire Bible. The church is important because of Him. He is its Savior. The doctrine of baptism has significance only because of its relationship to Christ. It is in baptism that we are united with Christ. We are baptized into Christ (Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:27). The Lord's Supper has importance because it commemorates Christ, His death, burial and resurrection. So it is with every part of the doctrine of Christ and the practice of New Testament Christianity. Everything is important because it relates to God's only begotten Son.

But another factor we must consider is that Christ did teach and preach doctrine. He did deliver a plan of salvation. There is the law of Christ. This law is revealed unto man in the Bible. There are commands, do's and don't's that must be respected and obeyed.

### **God's Plan**

The plan of Christ for saving man began with God's love and grace and mercy as was manifested through the gift of His Son. Man was lost in sin and unable to redeem himself by himself. He needed a Savior and God provided that Savior, who is Jesus Christ. Man could never merit even the opportunity to be saved, let alone salvation itself. But God has offered him this opportunity through Christ.

It was God's plan that Christ die on the cross for man's sins and by His blood we are redeemed. He bought us by the awesome price of His death. Without what Deity has done there would be no intelligence in continuing a discussion about the plan of salvation. There would be none.

But it is also true that as God has provided the way, man must come the way God has provided. To do this many must meet certain specified conditions laid down by God. Unless man meets those conditions he cannot enjoy the benefits of Christ's death. Even as he meets these conditions he does not earn

salvation, but without obedience to them there is no salvation for him. By obeying the terms of pardon man accepts what God has offered to give.

### **Man's Part in God's Plan**

Such conditions are man's part in God's plan for saving man. They include believing that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, repentance of sins, confession of faith in Christ, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins. Following being raised a new creature in Christ, man must live a faithful life of work and worship before God, living in the fellowship of Deity and the redeemed, with the hope and promise of heaven in his heart. This is not man's plan. It is God's plan. When men follow God's plan they are relying on God for salvation. Why else would Christ invite people to come to Him except they must come to Him to be saved?

It is utterly impossible to preach the whole counsel of God as inspired men preached it and try to preach Christ without preaching His plan of salvation, His doctrine. Please notice John 3:3, *"Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."* Jesus is teaching doctrine. He is teaching the necessity of the new birth. This involves water and the Spirit (John 3:5). The message of the Spirit is the plan of salvation which includes baptism into Christ (Romans 6:3,4). Upon obedience, one is raised to walk in newness of life, a new creature in Christ (Second Corinthians 5:17). He is born again.

Notice the charge Christ gave His apostles in Matthew 28:19,20, *"Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."* Does He not emphasize doctrine? Is not this the plan of salvation?

### **Plan at Work**

On Pentecost, the day the church began, Peter preached and his sermon is recorded in Acts two. It was a dynamic sermon preeminently about Jesus Christ as Lord. However, toward the conclusion, Peter taught the people to repent and be baptized. He preached doctrine. This people had to obey in order to be saved by the Christ Peter preached. It was impossible for him to

preach salvation through Christ, the person of Christ, without preaching the Person's plan of salvation.

In Acts 8:35ff, Philip met the Ethiopian who was reading from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. The prophecies were about Christ. The Ethiopian at first did not understand until Philip began at the same Scripture and preached unto him Jesus. What did Philip preach? He preached Christ to this man. Later, the man requested to be baptized. How did this "doctrinal" matter get into the discussion? Obviously, Philip had included that "doctrinal" matter while preaching Christ. Preaching Christ includes preaching the doctrine Christ delivered regarding the plan of salvation. You cannot preach Christ without preaching the law of Christ. You cannot preach the law of Christ without preaching the Person, Jesus Christ.

The teaching done by the apostle Paul included Christ and His doctrine. Consider Acts 17:18, First Corinthians 2:2; Second Corinthians 1:19. There is no question but Paul preached Christ. Yet, this same man taught the doctrine of faith (Acts 16:30,31). He taught the doctrine of repentance (Acts 17:30). He taught the doctrine of confession of Christ (Romans 10:10). He taught the doctrine of baptism (Romans 6:3-5; Galatians 3:27). In dedicating himself to preach nothing save Christ and Him crucified, he preached the Lord's plan of salvation and everything else the Lord commissioned to be taught in His name or by His authority. Again, we insist, it is impossible to preach one without preaching the other.

### **Both**

Therefore, we see it is not a matter of Christ OR doctrine. It is preach Christ AND His doctrine. It is a grave error to attempt to omit one or contrast one against the other. To love Christ is to obey His commandments (John 14:15). The only way we can demonstrate our love for Christ is by obeying His law.

Away, then, forever, with this false idea of "preach the man and not the plan." Rather let us do as we are directed and preach the man and His plan, preach the man by preaching His plan, preach the plan by preaching the man. Anything less is to fall short of our duty before God and man. To stress one, ignore and/or depress the other, to make either seem dispensable, is to misrepresent truth. May we not ever be guilty of doing so.

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# ***Divine Nourishment***

Of the some 600,000 fighting men who escaped from Egypt and heard the song of deliverance after emerging from the baptism unto Moses in the cloud and the sea, only two persons who were over twenty years old at the time finally entered the promised land of Canaan. They were Joshua and Caleb. The rest shared in the deliverance from Egypt but failed to reach the home God offered them. Why? Hebrews 3:12,19, *"Take heed brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God... So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief."*

It is a hard truth but we can be blessed with the forgiveness of our past sins and yet fail to enter into the eternal joy of heaven. When one believes and is baptized his past sins are forgiven and he enjoys salvation from sin (Mark 16:16). But people can forget that they were purged from their old sins (Second Peter 1:9) and not endure in faithfulness to the end (Matthew 10:22). Paul warned, First Corinthians 10:12, *"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."* Having become a child of God we are expected to live as one.

The distance from Egypt to Canaan was not great. Yet, it was forty years after the exodus from Egypt before Israel crossed Jordan. Because they believed not the good report of Joshua and Caleb after they had spied the land, but chose to believe the faithless report of the other ten spies, Israel was made to wander until all that generation perished in the wilderness.

It is true that the time in the wilderness educated Israel for their future destiny. It gave them opportunity to receive God's law and become acquainted with the Lord. They were schooled to trust and obey Him, which they did not always do. They learned they must live separately from the pagan and heathen nations. They developed that wholesome ruggedness that the school of adversity taught them. They were disciplined, chastened, humbled and made fit for their inheritance.

## **A Type**

All of this was typical and a pre-picture of the Christian life. John 17:15, *"I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."* It is

rightly said that Christians are IN the world but not OF the world. Christians must be trained for future triumphs and schooled through facing temptations, enduring conflicts, and being heroic in a wicked world by living righteously. We spend our lives being made fit for the inheritance of the saints. Colossians 1:12, *"Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light."* To be made "meet" is to be made suitable.

Exodus 15:22 through 17:7 tells of the Israelites in the wilderness at a time which was very distressing to them. They had successfully fled Egypt but were confronted with the need of food and water. We read how God supplied them with manna, quail and water from rock. Their nourishment was given them from God. The wilderness provided no sustenance and they were dependent on Jehovah for their daily food and drink.

### **Our Wilderness**

Life in this world is to the Christian somewhat like the wilderness. We are but strangers and sojourners passing through on our way to our eternal destiny (First Peter 1:7). This world does not furnish us the spiritual nourishment that we need. We do not curse the world because we realize there is much beauty and glory in this earth and its treasures which God created. There is happiness to be enjoyed in this life. This should provoke an unceasing gratitude unto God for such things. When we consider the wonders of nature, sun, moon, stars, waterfalls, mountains, valleys, seasons, crops, animals, the freshness of the morning air and the glory of the sunset, when we consider such things as we should we see they are teeming with grandeur. It is like our daughter once said when she was very small, "It is such a beautiful world. Why is it so hard?"

Life does have its hard parts. For some life seems to be a process of going from one hardship to another. Evil is often mixed into the cup of life. But most people will not consider all of life to be a burden and imposition. All is not bad. But as far as supplying us with the spiritual needs, this world is unable to provide. The spiritual blessings of pardon of sins, fellowship with God, purpose for life, hope for eternity, the promise of heaven and escape of hell, all these things cannot be found by the offerings of this world. We, like Israel, must look to God for the supply of these spiritual needs.

## **Bread**

God gave Israel their bread to eat from heaven. John 6:31-35, *"Our fathers did eat manna in the desert, as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven, but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."*

The Israelites received physical food, not from Moses, but from God. But the physical food is not the food and nourishment of the soul. That which nourishes the soul is the *"true bread,"* which Jesus identifies as Himself.

As the Israelites had to gather their food daily, so should we seek our daily supply by feeding upon the teachings of the Lord. Paul commended the Bereans because they searched the scriptures daily (acts 17:11). Only those who "eat" Christ, meaning to appropriate unto oneself the way of Christ, shall live by Him. He is the way of eternal life.

There were times when the Israelites murmured and complained about that which the Lord provided. How could we ever tire or complain about the spiritual food God provides for us? Do we long for the fleshpots of sin as Israel longed for the fleshpots of Egypt? They brought God's wrath upon themselves, and so shall we if we grow weary of feeding upon Christ. If we turn again to the weak and beggarly rudiments of this world, how shall we be supplied? Shall we not invite our own downfall? Indeed, we would perish in the wilderness.

## **Drink**

God gave Israel water to drink from the rock. First Corinthians 10:3,4, *"And did all eat the same spiritual meat and did all drink the same spiritual drink, for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ."* The rock which Moses struck from which poured the sustaining water was representative of Christ. The rock in the wilderness provided physical water and relieved their bodily thirst. But Christ provides the spiritual drink that satisfies the longings of the soul.

As Israel wandered in the wilderness, searching for water, failing to find it, how often people today wander in life searching and digging for relief of the spiritual tragedy of sin but looking in the wrong places. The history of our race is largely a history of man's efforts to satisfy the cravings of the spirit. People have sought it through wars, art, superstitions, philosophies, wealth, health, pleasure, fame, fortune, withdrawal from life, indulgences of passion, worldly frolics and solitude. The end result has been the same time and time again. They satisfy not. After every earthly fountain has been drained the soul of man remains athirst. Even when it is thought that water has been found, in time it proves to be the bitter water of Marah or the temporary refreshment of Elim.

Their supply and help came from an unexpected source. It came from an unpromising rock. This is it with us and Christ. Christ was and is considered by many to be offensive, the "*rock of offense*" (Romans 9:33). Unto the Jews He has been a stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness (First Corinthians 1:23). Though considered unpromising, the crucified One is the only source where the thirsty and perishing soul can find a fountain of mercy, love, life, forgiveness, and can drink forever. Moses smote the rock in the wilderness and life-giving water flowed. Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, was smitten for our transgressions and from Him flows the life-giving stream of spiritual healing and cleansing. Jesus is the Rock of Ages, the One cleft, split, broken for me and you and all mankind. now and until the world ceases to be.

## **The Rock**

The Scripture says the rock "*followed them.*" This had reference not to the literal rock that Moses struck, but to the One represented by that rock. Christ was with Israel in their season of distress and gave the needed provision and relief. So it is with Christ and those of us who are His people even now. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8), "*a very present help in time of trouble*" (Psalm 46:1). Our Lord will never forsake us, and His stream of mercy that flows on our behalf shall never be exhausted (Hebrews 13:6). Whether in youth, old age, sickness, health, prosperity, adversity, life or death, His love and truth never faileth (Romans 8:38,39; First Peter 1:25). It is as Jesus said to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, John 4:13,14, "*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."*

While God provides through Christ the divine nourishment we need, each one must partake of what is offered from himself or herself. Of what value would it be to an Israelite for Moses to strike the rock and water pour forth, or manna fall and be gathered daily and placed before the hungry, but those in need of nourishment refused to eat and drink? Even so in vain has God opened the fountain of life for those who will otherwise perish in the wilderness of sin if they reject the One God has provided. There is drink enough for all, but only those who come and drink shall live. Revelation 22:17, *"And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."* We drink, or die. John 7:37, *"If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink."*

When the journey is ended and this barren wilderness shall have been safely traversed, it shall be said of us, Revelation 7:16,17, *"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."*

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## **The Ground Was Cultivated**

When you read of digressive movements coming into an area with seeming success, such as the invasion of Boston Church heresies, you can be sure the field has been fertilized and cultivated to make the success possible. With years of compromise, "go-alongism," churches promoting recreation, secular education, weak Bible departments, worldliness, false teachers all around, and few elderships and preachers saying, doing or writing anything against it lest they be branded as unloving and judgmental, I say you can be sure heresy and apostasy of some sort will find a paved roadway. It is impossible that the timid, all-positive, "loving" kind of religion has either the power or will to deter such intrusions of error.

Unless and until brethren change their attitude toward opposing error, error will continue to have marvelous progress.

# ***The Faith of Rahab***

We turn to the Old Testament and the early history of Israel for our study. Israel left Egypt, wandered for forty years in the wilderness. Moses had turned the leadership into the hands of Joshua who then led the nation across the Jordan River into the promised land of Canaan. They came against their first obstacle which was the walled city of Jericho. It was a woman who had much to do with the success of Israel in taking that city. We read of her in Joshua chapter two, also New Testament references about her in the books of Hebrews and James. Our study concerns Rahab, particularly emphasizing the faith of Rahab. The quality of her faith is like that which we must also have to be saved and be pleasing to God.

We urge you to first read the second chapter of Joshua before continuing with this lesson. Without this Biblical background in mind we cannot keep our facts accurately before us and will likely miss the points of the lesson.

## **Her Character**

We shall first consider some lesser matters before we study her faith. What kind of woman was Rahab? She is identified as a harlot, which usually means a woman of loose moral character and conduct. Was Rahab a prostitute? She may well have been. There are evidences that she may not have been and we should consider them. (1) The word translated "*harlot*" sometimes was used to refer to nothing more than an innkeeper, a hostess. Josephus treats us with this information. (2) Even harlots were rejected by their families among the people of Jericho. But evidently Rahab had good relations with her family. (3) It is very unlikely that the spies, being on the business of God's people and selected because of their quality, would frequent a house of prostitution. So we are not far afield if we conclude that Rahab may not have been the degenerate type of person she is usually pictured to be.

The character of Rahab is not our theme. What she was at the beginning of this account is not so important as what she was at the end. This is true with everyone. What people have been in the past is very important, but not near so important as what they later become. Even more, it is important to know what

people can become and in which direction they are going.

### **Did She Lie?**

But another lesser matter. Did Rahab lie to the king of Jericho as to the whereabouts of the spies? Obviously, she lied to protect them. Does this mean that God approves of lying if good may come from it? Not at all! Biblical commands against lying are specific and pronounced. Neither is there any evidence that God approves of lying that "good" may come. Paul condemned doing evil that good may come (Romans 3:8). There is nothing reported to suggest that God gave sanction to Rahab's actions. He neither instructed her to lie nor pronounced her lie innocent. "*Thou shalt not bear false witness*" was, is, and ever will be God's will. We have no doubt that God could have provided for the safety of the spies many ways without the lie. But as God has so often done, He used the actions of people, actions of their own choice, both good and evil, to work His will.

The significant thing about Rahab is her faith, its quality and characteristics, as well as the actions taken based on her faith. Hebrews 11:31 points to her as an example of faith. "*By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.*" James mentions Rahab as an example of faith and works combined. James 2:25, "*Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?*" She was a person of great and noteworthy faith.

### **From Whence Came Her Faith?**

How was it that this Gentile woman came to have faith in God? Romans 10:17 teaches, "*Faith cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*" When one hears the Word and the evidence contained therein, he is convinced of the evidence and faith is created in the heart. Faith is a way of knowing based upon the evidence. It was this very process that produced Rahab's faith. Joshua 2:10,11, "*For we have HEARD [emphasis, JWB] how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt, and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we HEARD (emphasis, JWB) these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man,*

*because of you; for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath."*

### **Singular**

There are four outstanding qualities of Rahab's faith. First, it was a singular faith, by which we mean it was faith that was her own personal, individual faith that belonged singularly to her. Although all Jericho had heard the same message she heard, and others were fearful, she believed in the true God of Israel. The parable of the sower (Matthew 13) teaches us the various reactions people can have to the sowing of the seed. Her reaction was one of conviction and belief.

Such a position was personally hazardous for her, living among heathen people as she did. She might have been thought guilty of treason and forfeited her life. But evidently she did not fear to believe, nor to stand singularly alone if need be. She did not allow what others thought to determine her convictions. So many people weaken, bend and break beneath the pressure imposed on them from others. Many do not have the spiritual backbone to stand, doing their own individual thinking, but are swept along with the crowd whichever direction the crowd goes. But such was not the nature of Rahab. Nor can faithful people of God allow themselves to be the kind that can be tossed to and fro, going whatever direction the wind might be blowing at the time.

People of God have always had to have a singular faith. Individual conviction is the only worthwhile conviction. A "borrowed faith," meaning a conviction assumed simply because others have assumed it, will not sustain us. Joshua had this kind of faith when he said, *"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."* Elijah had it in his contest with the prophets of Baal. Peter, though not at first, had it when he said, *"We ought to obey God rather than men."* Paul had it when he withstood false teachers and gave them no place. So must we develop a singular faith.

### **Sympathetic**

Second, her faith was a sympathetic faith. She was not only concerned about herself, but also her family. In making the covenant with the spies she included her kin. She appreciated the dangers they also faced. She was determined to believe for

herself and also for what influence she could have on others. She had a great love, sympathy, compassion and interest in the welfare of others. She, a woman reared in a heathen environment, showed more concern for her kin and their physical safety than many "Christians" demonstrate for their kin and their spiritual safety. Even parents often drift along ignoring the spiritual training of their children as if such indifference will have no negative effect. Many are blinded to the spiritual destruction they make possible and probably for their own young. Certainly we know each will stand accountable before God individually. We shall not be judged as a world, nation, community, church or even a family. But what we do vitally affects those around us (Romans 14:7). Our influence on others is good reason for us to believe the things of God.

### **Sanctifying**

Third, her faith was a sanctifying faith. The word "sanctify" means to set apart, make holy. Sanctification is not some mysterious special direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Rahab was set apart from her friends and neighbors because she believed. It made her different. It caused actions by her that others would not have committed.

Too often you cannot tell as Christian from a non-Christian without a church directory. They lives are similar. They seem to have the same priorities, goals and ambitions in life. They drink the same brand of beer, smoke and/or chew the same kind of tobacco, tell and laugh at the same dirty stories, use the same kind of profanity, and are even found side by side on the same dance floors, even the same lakes or golf courses on Sunday mornings. How can you tell some are Christians?

John 17:15 teaches we are in the world but not of the world. Rather we are to be a peculiar, distinctive people (Titus 2:14). It is to be regretted that the faith of some seems to make no real difference in their manner of life. When such is true, the person does not have the same genuine faith that Rahab had. Her faith placed her into a select group. She dared to be different.

### **Saving**

Fourth, the faith of Rahab was a saving faith. Anyone who reads the Bible knows the necessity of faith to be saved. What all do not know is that faith alone does not save, denominational

teachers and doctrines notwithstanding. Faith alone is dead (James 2:17, 20, 24). Jesus said, 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 who is in heaven."* John 12:42 tells of some who believed in Jesus but would not confess him. Who could claim they were saved anyway? Agrippa believed, but he never obeyed (Acts 26:27). He was almost saved, but not altogether.

In contrast, as taught in Hebrews eleven, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Joseph, Moses, David, Samuel and unnamed others were people of faith. Their faith acted, however. It was not a mere mental asset. By their works their faith was made perfect, whole, complete (James 2:22). The faith that saves is the faith that obeys. Faith that will not produce obedient action harmonious with the will of God can avail nothing (James 2:26).

Rahab's faith caused her to receive the messengers, hide them, send them out another way. She believed and acted accordingly. The result was that she did not perish with the rest. She had a saving faith.

### **What of Us?**

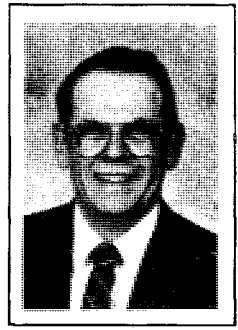
But this woman has long since been dead. What of our faith? Paul says these things were written for our learning (Romans 15:4). Is our faith like that of Rahab; singular, sympathetic, sanctifying and saving? God has provided every evidence needful to believe in Jesus as the Christ the Son of the living God. The Word has provided sufficient evidence to convince the honest and good heart of this truth. We have every cause to live life the way He prescribes. By coming to Him we can have every promise, hope, assurance and security the Lord offers the soul. Therefore, it is left for us to render obedience to His commands to repent, confess Him, and be baptized for the remission of sin, and live faithfully before Him.

† † † † †



## **Regarding Isaiah 7:14**

Joseph was comforted and reassured by the Holy Spirit that Mary's conception was the work of God, not man (Matthew 1:18-25). If Isaiah's prophecy had ever been fulfilled by a natural conception and birth, as some "dual-fulfillment" people claim, how could Joseph be comforted to know that Mary's conception was a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy? If the prophecy had been fulfilled once by a natural conception and birth, Joseph would have reason to doubt Mary's fidelity to him. Joseph knew Isaiah's prophecy had never been fulfilled previously. We wonder why "modern scholars" cannot understand it.



**JAMES W. BOYD**

Many Old Testament passages have less direct reference to the virgin birth, but this one is specific and unquestionably prophetic. To give ground to modernists who want to remove the Biblical teaching of the virgin birth is treason against Christ. It betrays one's own lack of soundness and loyalty to truth. This is not an area to compromise with anti-Christ. All should be steadfast in the singular application of Isaiah's prophecy to the birth of Jesus Christ, just as the inspired Matthew taught and just as faithful Christians have contended.

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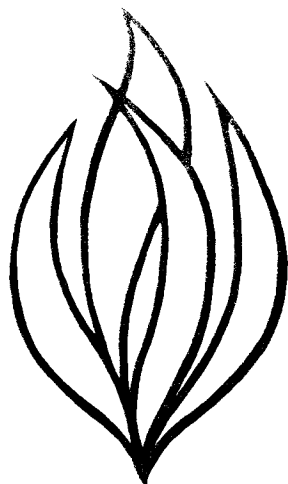
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# A Burning Fire



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

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# ***The Good Shepherd***

Our text is the lengthy and familiar passage of John 10:1-18. What you are about to read is intended to be studied alongside an open Bible at this text. Jesus is presented to us in several ways in Scripture that illustrate to us our relationship to Him, such as a vine and we are the branches, as head of the body and we are members of that body, as the cornerstone and foundation of the building and we are the living stones, as king over His kingdom and we are the citizens. But of all the pictures of Christ that is probably the best loved is that which portrays Him as the Good Shepherd.

The land of Jesus, Palestine, was familiar with the shepherd scene. Since the days of Abraham, and probably earlier, the inhabitants knew and understood the fortunes and experiences of the shepherd and the business of sheepkeeping. Jesus drew upon that knowledge to depict important truths regarding Himself, His people and the relationship between them.

There are two major presentations in the text that use the same word picture. One emphasis is on Jesus as the door of the sheepfold, and the other on Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

## **Sheepfold**

Verses one through six is the scene of a sheepfold where sheep are kept overnight. It is like a corral. The porter is left in charge until the next day, and opens the door for the sheep in the evening and morning. Each shepherd knew His own sheep and the sheep recognized the voice of its shepherd and would follow when called.

Verses seven through nine present Jesus as the door of the sheepfold. Keep in mind the sheepfold was the place of safety, comfort and protection and served to shield the sheep from the elements and wild beasts as well as preventing the sheep from being scattered in the darkness of night. Entrance into the fold was through the door.

God has provided a sheepfold which is His church. Here is the place of salvation and protection from the ravages of sin and Satan. Those who are saved are added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:47). Christ is the Savior of the church (Ephesians 5:23). The only way one may enter into this haven of salvation

is through Jesus Christ.

Just as the sheep must have proper nourishment, food and water, they must go through the door to reach it. This is not picturing an entrance and exit of the church, but simply shows that as sheep must use the door to gain their needs, so must mankind go through Christ to obtain the spiritual nourishment necessary for them. He is the only way (John 14:6) and there is no other (Acts 4:12). All spiritual blessings are in Him (Ephesians 1:3).

One cannot climb into the spiritual sheepfold any other way than the door God provides. One cannot go in and out for spiritual nourishment except through Christ. He is the door, the only door. False teachers, pictured as thieves and robbers, cannot provide.

### **Jesus as Shepherd**

But Jesus as the door is not the major portion of the text, but rather the second application of the shepherd scene is the more important. Here Jesus draws a contrast between Himself and false shepherds, showing what He does for His people.

A false shepherd, or a hireling, is not primarily concerned for the welfare of the sheep. His chief concern is himself, his gain and his personal welfare. When danger threatens he flees, shirking his responsibilities and leaving the sheep exposed as prey to whatever danger that comes against them. Is this not what false teachers do? Do they not pervert truth and go the way of men, leading them into spiritual poverty and starvation, condemnation and destruction? Many in Jesus' day were false teachers as false teachers continue to exist now. They have little concern for the flock but great interest in their own gain, fame and glory. They preach and teach what is necessary to bring them such things, being more like financial profiteers than keepers of the flock.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who seeks the good of His sheep. *"I am come that they might have life and have it more abundantly."* (Verse 10). Because of Jesus mankind can have a full, abundant, sufficient and successful life both here and in the hereafter. He is the kind of shepherd that would sacrifice himself for the benefit of those in his care. In fact, Jesus did exactly that. *"I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep."* (Verse 11).

David was that kind of shepherd when he placed his very life

in danger by wrestling the lion and bear to save his sheep (First Samuel 17:34-37).

*"Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father."* (Verses 17,18). Jesus had reference to His forthcoming death, burial and resurrection. All of that demonstrates His concern and sacrifice for His sheep.

### **Evil Shepherds**

Ezekiel 34:1-10 teaches us God's distaste for wicked shepherds. *"And the word of the Lord came unto me saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God to the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, ye clothe you with wool, ye kill them that are fed; but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd; and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill; yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them. Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: As I live, saith the Lord God, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock, therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at thier hand, and cause them to escape from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves anymore; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them."*

A good shepherd "goeth before his sheep," leading rather than driving. He protects, seeks the lost, takes his flock to the still waters and green pastures.

Jesus struck a stinging blow at the pride and self-righteousness of the Jews when He taught that Gentiles as well as Jews would be included in His flock. *"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."* (Verse 16). Just as there is one shepherd, there is also one fold, one church.

### **The Shepherd Psalm**

One of the favorite passages of Scripture for every Bible student is that great shepherd psalm, Psalm twenty-three. As one reads it he is impressed with the emphasis of the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep. It is a passage that fills the heart with hope, comfort, and serves as a reminder of the bountiful blessings for man provided by the Shepherd. Without the Lord we would be scattered sheep, lost and in danger. Man in sin is pictured by Isaiah 53:6, *"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every man to his own way."* What a magnificent and inexpressible privilege to have the Son of God to be our Shepherd over the soul.

### **The Sheep**

But there is another consideration we must see. We have noted Jesus as the door and the shepherd. But the implication is that we are the sheep. To admit we are sheep is to admit we need guidance, and are helpless alone. It is to admit that we can and do stray, get lost and wander. Though our Shepherd is good, are we to conclude the sheep are without any responsibility? Did not the sheep hear the shepherd's voice, being familiar with it? Are we not to familiarize ourselves with His voice through His Word? Did not the sheep follow where led? Are we not to follow where Jesus leads us? Can we rebel and refuse Him and still expect His care to provide anyway? While we observe the greatness of the Shepherd, do not overlook the duty that belongs to the sheep.

Peter pictures Christ as our shepherd. First Peter 2:25, *"For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now turned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."* There awaits the gift for those who follow the Shepherd. First Peter 5:4, *"And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."* While this is said specifically of faithful elders, the principle is true for every sheep. As one has said of

the loving care given the flock by the Good Shepherd while we live on earth, and remembering the ultimate glory, "All this and heaven, too." This is the blessing of having Jesus Christ as our Shepherd.

If one is not a Christian he is not in the Lord's sheepfold of salvation. None of the benefits belong to him. Even as the Lord longs for you to be counted among His sheep, this is a matter that each individual must decide for himself or herself. He is willing to be your Shepherd through life and into eternal glory, but you must choose to be His sheep. Even now, through the gospel, He calls.

† † † † †

## ***Who Is A Liar?***

Our lesson is from the inspired writing of the apostle John. John is often considered in terms of a man of great love, kindness, tenderness and closeness with God. He is generally considered to have been the disciple to whom Christ gave the charge and care of His mother Mary when He was dying on the cross. The gospel according to John is one that emphasizes the love of God for man, the love of Christ for the lost, and the love that man is to have toward God and his fellowman. Therefore, John is often called "the apostle of love."

But there was a side of John, though not contradictory to that of love, that is coarser, more blunt, one that hardly sustained his reputation of the popular notion that gentleness was his only trait. Mark 3:17 identifies John as the brother of James and a son of thunder, implying exceptional zeal and aggressiveness, with a forcefulness that at times was almost ferocious.

One of those times is recorded in Luke 9:54 when Jesus was coming into a Samaritan city but was not well received. John suggested a stern and rather harsh action against them and thought the Lord would "*command fire to come down and consume them.*"

Another time when John was more aroused was when he and his brother James caused dissension among the apostles by

asking for places of special honor and privilege in the Lord's kingdom.

### **Five Times From John**

What John wrote was not his own will but the will of Deity who guided him. His words of teaching were inspired and infallible. This same John wrote letters to Christians that we call First, Second and Third John. In First John, five times he identified those he called liars. He asks the question, "*Who is a liar?*" The word "*liar*" is a very strong term and many are provoked to great anger when it is applied to them. Many are even slow to apply the term to those who are obviously just exactly what the word suggests. The Scriptures have strong and condemning words toward those who are flippant and irresponsible concerning telling the truth.

Most people have some respect for what they think is the truth. They do not always know the truth, but they respect what they think truth is. Sometimes you encounter those who are liars, who know they are liars, God knows they are liars, and they have little respect for the truth even when they know better. But they are generally the exception.

In our judicial courts witnesses must assure the court that their testimony is the truth. Failure to tell the truth is perjury and those who are guilty of perjury are subject to punishment. A lie is the opposite of the truth. Whatever is not truth may properly be called a lie, although many times people do not intend to lie. Lying is one of the most reprehensible and despicable deeds of the human family. But it is frequently done.

The reason we need to consider John's definitions of liars is because he mentions some that people do not generally place in that category. We usually think of those who deliberately deceive, mislead, misrepresent and falsify to be the liars. They are. But John assigns the term to some who simply do not hold to what God has declared to be true. The reason for the lesson should be easily grasped, seeing that John wrote in Revelation 21:8 that among those that shall be in the lake of fire and brimstone are "*all liars.*"

### **Walks in Darkness**

First John 1:6, "*If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth.*" Those who



claim fellowship with God but at the same time live lives of sinfulness are liars, according to the Holy Spirit. Darkness and light cannot exist at the same time in the same place. Light is often used in the Scriptures to denote purity and goodness. Darkness is to depict wickedness. Just as darkness and light cannot exist together, neither can sin and righteousness remain side by side in the same heart and life harmoniously.

Darkness is used to define the kingdom of Satan from which the saved have been delivered (Colossians 1:13). It depicts evil, corruption, impurity and that which is opposite to God and His Son, Jesus Christ and that which He taught.

To walk in the light means to live in harmony with the Lord's law. Such harmony brings us into fellowship with God and is necessary to maintain that fellowship. Therefore, we are deprived of fellowship with Deity if we choose to go the dark and dreary way of sin, but inconsistently and erroneously still claim fellowship with Him. This should provoke us all to examine the path of life we trod.

### **Admits No Sin**

In the same chapter, verses eight and ten, John said the one who says he has no sin is a liar. He calls them liars in two ways. (1) Truth is not in them. (2) Their claim makes God a liar, something which it is impossible for God to be and do (Hebrews 6:18). Jesus did not sin, "*neither was there guile found in his mouth.*" (First Peter 2:22). Since Deity cannot, has not, and will not lie, and Deity says that we all do sin, those who take issue with that are the liars.

It is characteristic for people to attempt to escape their guilt and responsibility for sin. Sin has been called just a weakness, a disease (such as drunkenness), of some other softening of the matter of sin. But we need to hear God and learn the weight and wages of sin, its destructiveness and havoc. We need to develop a genuine reproach and hatred toward sin. To deny that we do sin is to bring condemnation upon ourselves. Please note these words were written to those who were already Christians. So away with that false doctrinal notion that Christians do not sin and cannot sin so as to be lost. Christians make a serious mistake not to pray to God for forgiveness, being of penitent heart. There is a different relationship with God between the Christian who sins and the sinner who has never come to Christ. Christians have the privilege of prayer and can

ask to be forgiven. To deny sinfulness is to make ourselves liars.

### **Disobedient**

First John 2:4, *"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."* Refusal to obey God makes one a liar. Notice verse three. We can know that we know God if we obey God. It is futile to claim this saving knowledge and at the same time defy His commandments.

To know God means more than simply having knowledge that God exists. Many who are lost know God exists. They even admit His existence. The knowledge of which John wrote refers to the close relationship between the Christian and God, like that of parent and child, Father and son or daughter. The Christian knows God's characteristics, likes, dislikes, His will, His expectations, and enjoys His presence. To have enjoyed good fortune does not necessarily mean that one is acceptable to God. Sometimes people are heard to say that the Lord has been with them over the years and that the Lord has walked hand in hand with them through life and blessed them as a father would a child. Yet, it cannot be so because they have not ever obeyed and entered into that saving knowledge and relationship with God that can be ours only upon obedience to the gospel. If we really know God we will obey His Word.

### **Denier**

Also in First John 2:22 we read, *"Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son."* This makes many people of this mixed up world, even many religious people, liars and subject to the lake of fire and brimstone.

Some consider Jesus as nothing more than an influential first century Jewish teacher, a good man, and other respectable things, but not the Son of God and the Christ. To refuse to confess Jesus as the Christ the Son of God is to make oneself a liar, John teaches. This would include all infidels, atheists, agnostics, those who serve other gods in other religions, such as Jews, Mohammedans and others who may even claim to serve Jehovah but deny Jesus as the Christ. The failure to confess Christ is tantamount to denying Him (Luke 12:8,9). We are either for Him or against Him (Matthew 6:24; 12:30). It is

equally impossible to say you believe God but deny that Jesus is His Son. Jesus repeatedly affirms He is the Son of God. He either told the truth or He is a liar, an unthinkable conclusion. Verse twenty-three makes this point with force. *"Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father, but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also."*

### **Lacks Love**

Finally, First John 4:20 identifies a liar this way. *"If a man say I love God, and hateh his brother, he is a liart; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"* Love brings forth actions and expressions of kindness, consideration, respect and helpfulness. Hateful words, spiteful behavior, rudeness, deliberate injury shows a lack of love.

John reasons so sensibly. It is natural to love what is nearby and can be seen. But if we cannot love our brother who is nearby and very visible, how can we say we love God whom we cannot see? The "son of thunder" hurls a thunderbolt against those who withhold love of others. Those that love God will love those whom God loves.

Jesus taught that loving each other is a way that we show we are His disciples. John 13:35, *"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."*

In these five ways John identifies a liar. If we be indicted by these words, let us stedfastly examine our hearts, remove the lies, replace them with truth, escape the lake of fire and brimstone, be the people of truth that God expects, not only telling the truth, but conforming to the will of God in our lives. Let us never be justifiably defined as a liar as John has defined them. Truth makes us free (John 8:32).

† † † † †

### **Holiness**

Holiness is the quality of being the set apart and peculiar people of God because of having been washed pure of sin by the blood of Christ. It is the condition of being sanctified, separated from sin and united with the Lord. jwb

# ***The Faith Once Delivered***

Jude 1-4, *"Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called; mercy unto you, and peace, and love be multiplied. Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ."*

There has always been a need to emphasize the benefits gained in a firm religious faith. Faith has been an asset to youth, people in old age, marriage, home, society generally. The loss of faith has been a major factor in moral decline, rebellion, frustration and confusion. But not just any faith is beneficial. The faith of Christ is that faith that benefits.

It is a low and demeaning estimate of His faith or religion to have a flippant attitude toward truth and speak with shallow mind as many do as if all faiths are of equal benefit, or one faith as being just as good as another, or that just any sincere faith can lead one to heaven, or that there is no infallible standard of faith by which to ascertain right and wrong. There are absolutes in religion just as in other realms. The idea of letting the conscience be the guide and that honesty and sincerity are sufficient is an affront to the faith of which Jesus Christ is the author and founder.

It cannot be amiss to make inquiry into Jude's words about the faith once delivered to the saints. Jude, like Paul, urges adherence to ascertained truth. Paul said, Second Timothy 1:13,14, *"Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me, in faith and in love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us."* Titus 2:1,8, *"But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine... sound speech that cannot be condemned; that he that is of contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you."* There is that which is sound and that which is unsound. There is right and there is wrong.

Our text makes four assertions and imposes one obligation.

We shall discuss these in order, noticing the basic religious facts revealed in this passage.

### **The Faith**

The first assertion is the existence of an organized and formal body of truth called "*the faith*." The word "*faith*" is used differently in Scripture. Sometimes it means to believe or trust, simply a mental state that leads to action (John 8:24). In Romans 14:23 it refers to one's personal convictions, what one believes to be true without regard whether that conviction is true before God or not. It refers to what one holds in his conscience. Also, faith is used to refer to the thing believed, an objective faith, the truth accepted, which embraces the whole Christian system (Galatians 1:23; Second Timothy 4:17). This last meaning is what Jude means when he writes of "*the faith*." That there is such a body of truth is also affirmed in Ephesians 4:4 where the inspired pen wrote, "*There is one faith*."

### **Once Delivered**

The second assertion is that "*the faith*" was "*once delivered*." Emphasis now is on the word "*once*." The faith once delivered means that the revealed faith lacks nothing and has been fully revealed. It was completed when the last inspired writer put aside his pen. "*Once*" is translated from the Greek word "*hapax*" which means that which is of perpetual validity, once for all, lacking nothing, never in need of repetition in the sense of alteration or changes later. "*The faith*" never needs revising or up-dating. It does not mean that we are not to repeat the gospel story. But it means the revelation from God to man is not continuous, but is an accomplished fact. "*Once*" is the same word used when Paul was stoned "*once*." Hebrews 9:27 speaks of man being "*appointed once to die*." Christ was "*offered for sins once*." There is no inadequacy in the revelation, nor shall there be need for additions, post scripts, prefixes or suffixes.

This assertion is very vital to us inasmuch as many religious cults and doctrines are built on the claim of continuous and/or latter-day revelations. Mormonism, for instance, is founded on the claimed latter-day revelation God is alledged to have given Joseph Smith. Seventh-Day Adventism is founded on prophecies and writing of William Miller and Ellen G. White who claimed latter-day revelation. Christian Science is the same but

based on the claims of Mary Baker Eddy. Romanism is based on progressive and ever-changing revelation from God as claimed by the popes and councils. Pentecostals claim God still speaks directly to them today.

If God's revelation is ever-changing, being altered, could one ever really know what the truth of God is from one moment to the next? Roman Bishop Purcell said in 1837, "We never call the pope in any sense God." But look how that has changed. They call him Holy Father. The doctrine of his supposed infallibility was not even adopted until 1870, and made retroactive. That Mary bodily entered heaven is another Catholic latter-day revelation, that even contradicts Scripture (First Corinthians 15:50). The same is true of all the various claims of God speaking directly to the religious leaders of the various sects. Protestantism fares no better because all of their creeds are unauthorized by Scripture. They all have come since Jude wrote that the faith was once delivered. Read such passages as First Corinthians 13:8-10; Ephesians 4:11-13; Galatians 1:6-9; Acts 20:26; Second Peter 1:3; Second Timothy 3:16,17, and know that God has fully revealed His will to mankind and that will is now embodied in the verbally inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient Scriptures, the Bible.

## **To Men**

The third assertion of Jude is the authority of *"the faith."* *"The faith"* was delivered. It was delivered to men, not invented by men. It came as promised. John 14:25,26, *"These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."* John 16:12,13, *"I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak, and he will show you things to come."* Galatians 1:11,12, *"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ."*

*"The faith"* was delivered unto the apostles. First Corinthians shows that the apostles were men as other men outside their apostolic office. *"But I keep under my body, and bring it unto*

subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be as castaway." But they were the ones through whom *"the faith"* was announced. First Corinthians 2:12,13, *"Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual."* Second Peter 1:20,21, *"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."*

Three terms in the New Testament are used with reference to the apostles and how Deity used them to announce God's truth. Those terms are *"ambassadors,"* (Second Corinthians 5:20); keepers of the divine embassy with delegated authority; *"earthen vessels,"* (Second Corinthians 4:7), being human beings who were inspired of Deity; and *"witnesses"* (Acts 1:8), a term denoting the validity of the testimony of the apostles. They were the first to preach the unsearchable riches of salvation. Their message was of God, not of man.

### **Saints**

The fourth assertion is that *"the faith"* was once delivered to the saints. This does not have reference to the deliverance of truth through the apostles, already discussed, but *"saints"* refers to those to whom the truth was directed for their custody, care, proclamation and protection. Neither the apostles nor the other saints were granted power to change, alter, diminish or expand the truth. But they were to be the trustees of it and see that the world had opportunity to hear it. First Timothy 3:15, *"...the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."* We cannot expect the children of the devil to preach the Word. This is the work of God's people.

### **A Duty**

Before making these four assertions Jude imposed a solemn duty. *"Earnestly contend for the faith."* This implies engaging in warfare, a contest, in competition with Satan for the souls of mankind. It notes a struggle, defense and promotion of *"the faith"* with all of our heart. Colossians 3:23, *"And whatsoever*

ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord." Romans 12:11, "...fervent in spirit..." Galatians 4:18, "But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing..." This conveys the idea regarding our approach to contending for the faith. Jeremiah said, "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully," meaning negligently. (Jeremiah 48:10).

There are several reasons why we must contend for the faith. (1) An inspired writer has commanded it. (2) "*The faith*" is the gospel of Christ, God's power unto salvation. (3) Only by following "*the faith*" can one be lifted to salvation. (4) All spiritual blessings are ours through obedience to "*the faith*" that brings us into Christ. (5) There will always be those who will contend against it.

Second Timothy 4:3,4 reveals how some will not endure sound doctrine. Second Peter 2:1,2 warns of false teachers, as does John 4:1. Contending for the faith will bring conflict, sacrifice, persecution and rejection. But we must "*stand fast in the faith.*"

Error takes many forms and is very deceitful. Teachers of error will even appear as angels of light. We must ever be watchful, hold the line that God has drawn, compromise no revealed truth, and be stalwart soldiers of the cross. We must determine that false ways and those who advocate them, in or out of the church, shall not pass.

Though this passage is relatively brief, it is a soul-stirring portion of truth. We who profess to be disciples of Christ have the duty and opportunity to heed these words. May we not fail our Lord in earnestly contending for the faith once delivered to the saints!

† † † † †

In an article, January 1945, about J. W. McGarvey and the difference between his inconsistencies and the consistency of David Lipscomb regarding instruments of music in worship and the missionary societies, J. M. McCaleb wrote of brother McGarvey, "McGarvey, though opposing the use of instruments in worship, would cooperate with those who used them. He held the undesirable position of trying to run with the hare and at the same time keep with the hounds."



# ***Why Marriages Succeed***

Our nation has a very unenviable divorce rate, presently about one out of two marriages ending in divorce. This is cause for alarm not only among those who respect the will of God, but also for economists, historians, psychologists, law enforcement agencies, educators and others who are concerned for the welfare of the future of our nation. The disintegration of the home cannot be denied. Furthermore, there are rabid and active opponents working for the total destruction of the home as we know it and have learned from the Bible.

There are many reasons why marriages fail and these deserve study. But we can learn all the reasons for failure and still not know why marriages succeed. In an all-inclusive statement we can say that marriages succeed because a man and a woman who love one another and decide to live together in marriage listen to God.

There is much in Scripture pertaining to marriage, the home, husbands, wives, and the rearing of children. Those who succeed obey the voice of God. Let us consider a few areas where they listen to Him.

## **Purposes**

Husbands and wives listen to God when He tells them that marriage is a divine institution with spiritual purposes (Genesis 2:18,22). Marriage came from the mind of God, as did the church. It is more than a social, legal and economic contract. Instituted by God, it is for the good of mankind (Genesis 2:18).

One of the primary purposes of marriage is to provide companionship, helpfulness, procreation. It is also to avoid fornication. Marriage is a relationship that is designed in which one helps the other to please God in life and to go to heaven when this life is over. In marriage we are not dealing with just men, women, society, civil laws, etc. We are concerned with the souls of people. Any disposition of marriage must include God who originated it. Marriages are more likely to succeed when the spiritual side of it is respected.

## **Adults**

Marriages succeed when the husband and wife listen to God when He tells them that marriage is for adults. The divorce rate among those who marry in their teen years is four times higher than the deplorable national average. God said, "*Let a MAN (emphasis, JWB) leave his father and mother...*" Marriage is not child's play. It requires more than physical maturity. There must be a reasonable degree of emotional, mental and spiritual maturity to handle the duties and privileges of marriage.

We sometimes hear people blame marriage failure on incompatibility. More often than not it is irresponsibility due to immaturity. It is a case where "children" have attempted to assume an adult role. In marrying too early in life we also see the danger of brief courtships that do not allow for the discovery of the levels of maturity. One mate may say to another, "You do not seem to be the same person I married." If they married very young, you can be sure after a very few years they will not be the same people because they married while they were still growing up. They should wait until they are grown.

### **Oneness**

Successful marriages are enjoyed when husband and wife listen to God as He teaches the oneness of marriage. "*The two become one flesh.*" There is to be the leaving of parents and the cleaving to each other. There is to be unity and oneness in handling the finances of the home. There is to be unity in the matter of faith. There is to be loyalty to one's mate above everyone else except Deity. No in-law or outlaw can drive a wedge between a husband and wife who are loyal first to each other. The reason others can sometimes contribute to splitting a marriage is because the married ones are not united as they should be. In marriage it is no longer me-my-mine, you-yours. Everything becomes we-us-ours. Unless we listen to God in this respect we invite trouble. Even blessed children should not be allowed to divide husband and wife.

### **Love**

Marriages succeed when husbands and wives listen to God when He teaches there must be love in the home. Love is seeking the other's highest good. Wives are to love their husbands and husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. Too often people think of love only in terms of

sexual relationships. This is involved in marriage, and is an expression of love that God reserves for the husband and wife. Sexual relationships outside of the bond of marriage are sin, whether it be before marriage or after marriage. How can there be the trust, mutual respect, esteem and admiration one for the other when such unfaithfulness to the vows of marriage are in evidence? How can there be the holding up of each other's hands as is necessary in marriage when there is betrayal?

Two major complaints made by wives and husbands are: (1) she nags and belittles; (2) and he constantly criticizes and finds fault. Such is simply a manifestation of the lack of love. Love will unselfishly seek what God has decreed to be for the good of the other. Certainly we are not to be totally blind to the faults of the other. But the motive behind noting the faults is all important. Is it to hurt, ridicule, degrade and harm, or is it to help the other improve and overcome fault? We need the insight of each other, but we do not need the barrage of criticism designed to humiliate and destroy. Furthermore, marriage partners need to be considerate in choosing the time to mention faults and shortcomings. Some have done it so openly and publicly to the hurt and embarrassment of the other that it scars. This is not a manifestation of genuine love.

### **Sexual Relationship**

Marriages succeed when people listen to God regarding the sexual association in marriage. First Peter 3:7 and First Corinthians 7:2-5 gives us the divine mind in this realm. One purpose of marriage is to provide for the satisfaction of the sexual appetite. In marriage it is a relationship that is sacred, pure, holy and undefiled. Outside of marriage it is a degenerate behavior that reduces people to the level of animals. There is no way for even this sophisticated and permissive society of today to so glamorize sin as to make it acceptable before God and before those who love God.

Though there be many similarities between husband and wife, there are also tremendous differences and these differences must be respected. There are differences other than physical differences. God made us so as to complement each other. The bodily association must include the greatest respect for the body of each other. The body is the temple of God (First Corinthians 3:16). Your body belongs to your mate and vice versa. Yet, each body deserves the utmost care and kindness. The sexual

relation in marriage is not merely an animalistic craving being satisfied. It is, as already stated, an added language of love.

Many enter marriage without understanding the functions of the body. This can be learned without carnality and sinfulness. The duty of parents is to see to it that their children know the sacredness of the body, its function, and how God intends its use. Young people ought not have to learn such things from the alley, restroom walls, filthy language of peers or through fornication. Explicit and reverent material is available to assist parents in the discharge of this duty.

### **Unselfishness**

Marriages will more likely succeed when partners listen to God and apply the Christian virtue of selflessness. Selfishness is often at the tap root of marital problems. When we see husbands loving their wives as Christ loved the church, and wives loving their husbands in return as the church is to love Christ, there is the basis for a happy home. But the disposition to have “my way” and seek only what “I want” will soon destroy a marriage.

God teaches that the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23). This does not contend that the husband is superior and the wife inferior. Each is superior in his or her role and realm. Each becomes misplaced outside that realm. There is no room for a tyrannical husband or a domineering wife. In both instances that only brews marital strife. Selfishness makes marriages unhappy. Selflessness contributes to a successful marriage.

### **Duration**

Marriages are more likely to succeed when both listen to God when He teaches that marriage is for life, “till death do us part,” in sickness and health, prosperity and adversity, for better or worse, good times, bad times, all times. Marriage partners must enter marriage with that understanding and intent. Anything less is to distort what God has implanted. It has been that way since the beginning, Jesus said in Matthew 19:8. This idea of trial marriages is an abomination to every nation.

In conclusion, as goes the home, so goes the nation, society generally, even the church. The home is the basic unit of society. From the home comes the population of everything. The stream cannot rise above the fountain from which it flows.

Those in marriage and those contemplating marriage must learn these things and keep them in mind throughout marriage. Such doctrine from Deity is indispensable for a successful marriage. God's richest blessings will abide with those who will listen to Him and heed His Word.

† † † † †

## ***Why Not Submit To The Inevitable?***

Isaiah 1:18, "*Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord...*" Our lesson makes an appeal for us to be sensible, reasonable and act accordingly.

To speak of something being inevitable is to speak of those things that cannot under any circumstances or conditions be avoided. There are a number of inevitables, such as, if we continue to live, we shall grow older. Leaving this life is something we cannot escape. The Bible further reveals that there awaits everyone the resurrection, judgment and eternity. While there are many matters of life that are not "set in concrete," the matters mentioned above are inevitable. Most people resign themselves to the inevitable even though they do not always do so with grace and composure.

Most reasonable people, and we like to think of ourselves in that light, would rather gain or benefit from something than suffer loss, especially if they have to do that something whether they want to or not. Let me illustrate. When I was young I received a small allowance of money each week provided I did the various chores that were assigned me. But whether I did those chores willingly or unwillingly, I had to do the chores. Only if I did them willingly did I receive the allowance. I could do them and be blessed, or do them and not be blessed, possibly even be punished. Either way I had to do them. Only if I did them as prescribed would I benefit. Which way do you think was the way that was reasonable for me?

### **The Way Revealed**

God has revealed the way He has provided for us to be saved. He saw man in sin and unable to save himself, but He loved man and sent His Son to die on the cross to save man. Man, in order to receive the benefit of what God did must believe in Christ, repent of his sins, confess his faith in Christ, and be baptized for the remission of sins. Some obey the will of God while others do not.

Of course, God does not force salvation upon anyone. But if we are to be saved we must obey the plan God has devised, designed and delivered. But whether we do what we are supposed to do with a willing heart and receive His blessing of forgiveness of sins, or refuse to do what He says, we shall do these things He commands eventually. If we do not do them in this life, willingly, we shall not receive the reward. But the point we must insist is that we shall eventually do them anyway. Is it not more reasonable to do them at the time and in the way that will be of benefit to the soul?

### **Not Forced to Believe, Yet...**

You may think nobody will ever force you to believe, repent, confess Christ, or be baptized, but that is not true. If you do not do these things because you wish to serve God, you will do them some time in your future by force, but without receiving any benefit.

Jesus said, *"I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins."* (John 8:24). Hebrews 11:6, *"But without faith it is impossible to please him..."* John 3:16 also teaches the absolute necessity of faith to receive everlasting life. One may refuse to believe in this life, but, John 5:28,29, *"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the grave 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."* Romans 14:10, *"...for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."* Jesus will be our Judge (Second Timothy 4:10). We shall be judged by His Word (John 12:48) and He alone has the Word of life (John 6:33). All will be believers that day.

The day of judgment may be somewhat of a surprise for many. Can you imagine the surprise for the brothers of Joseph when they learned that the very one they had offended and rejected was second to Pharoah and in his hands was the

decision of their very life? If someone had told them such would happen before they left for Egypt they would never have believed it. But when they saw him, surprised or not, there was Joseph over them. Just so, you may not believe in Christ as the Son of God, Savior of mankind, and Judge of all, but on that day of judgment there will not be anyone to question it.

Thomas doubted for a while that Jesus had been raised from the dead. But when Jesus spoke to him and showed him the evidence, he believed. John 20:27,28, *"Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side, and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."*

But if we wait until the judgment to believe, it will be too late for our salvation. Nothing changes our destiny once this life is finished. Once the doors are shut they remain so. Opportunities gone will be recalled but only in memory. Cannot you see how reasonable it is to believe now while it is to your advantage?

### **Not Forced to Repent, Yet...**

Again our Lord said, Luke 13:3, *"I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."* Paul said, Acts 17:30, *"And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent."*

Repentance involves sorrow for sin, turning from sin, making up one's mind to leave sinful ways. It is a prerequisite to forgiveness of sins; something which involves all mankind (Romans 3:23).

There is a certain pleasure derived from sin (Hebrews 11:25) and this is sin's appeal. But its rewards are temporary and ultimately its wages is spiritual death (Romans 6:23). Christ asked men to cease sinning. *"Go and sin no more."* (John 8:11). Some give heed to His voice while others continue the path to death.

But the time is coming when everyone shall cease to sin. They will stop it. When a man dies he has done his last evil deed, spoken his last profane word, thought his last wicked thought. From that time forward he will abide by the Lord's will. It is the Lord's will that the rebellious shall receive just recompense for their deeds. Man has the power of choice while he lives, but

after physical death overtakes him, no longer is choice his to execute.

Since it is inevitable that we shall cease to sin, why not stop sinning now while it can do us some spiritual good? You cannot escape repenting and turning from sin any more than you can escape believing that Jesus is who He claimed to be.

### **Not Forced to Confess, Yet...**

Again, Jesus taught the necessity to confess Him (Luke 12:8,9). Similarly, Romans 10:9,10, *"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."* One cannot be saved without confessing Christ. Some respond in obedience while others choose to defy and deny Him.

But what saith the Scriptures? Philippians 2:9-11, *"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* Romans 14:11, *"For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God."* This includes those who confess Him in this life as well as those who refuse to confess Him now.

The point we make is that we all shall confess Him. It is inevitable. Why not make that "good confession" while there are blessings to be received for doing so rather than waiting until forced to confess Him but without benefit?

### **Not Forced to be Baptized, Yet...**

Jesus taught baptism to be saved (Mark 16:16). So did Peter (Acts 2:38). Saul was taught the same thing (Acts 22:16). Paul taught it as the avenue *"into Christ"* (Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4). Is it not strange how some people rebel against baptism? But it is folly to anyone to think they shall escape being baptized.

The baptism now required is water baptism (Acts 8:36; 10:47). This is an immersion in water for the remission of sins. Here is where one reaches the saving blood of Jesus Christ as we are baptized into the benefits of His death, and His blood



was shed in His death (John 19:34; Romans 6:3,4).

But should anyone refuse to obey this water baptism, there awaits another baptism, the baptism of fire (Mark 3:11), which John said Jesus would administer, and this in the context of separating the wheat from the chaff (Luke 3:16,17). A similar thought is presented in Revelation where we are told of the wicked being cast into the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone (Revelation 21:8).

Baptism in water while we live helps us. Baptism in fire is reserved for the disobedient. But baptism is inevitable. It is simply a matter of our choice which baptism it will be for us.

We plead with each one to simply use good judgment and show yourself reasonable. We are commanded to believe, repent, confess and be baptized. We shall do each of these things sometime under some circumstance. Will it be while there remains opportunity for salvation, or shall we wait until these things are forced upon us without benefit?

† † † † †

### **An Awakening Is Needed**

There are many who are very busy promoting and sponsoring various "youth meetings" among the young of the churches of Christ. Having a meeting of young people may have certain potentially good effects, but too often it is nothing more than an additional effort by those who are no longer in love with the truth to get the young away from the influence of parent, home and local church in order to indoctrinate them in the ecumenical and denominational compromises that the promoters and their invited teachers have adopted.

A lot is made about having action among the youth and the appeal is made that these episodes are "a lot of fun." More and more there are those among the "youth leaders" who equate "spiritual" with "fun." It sounds like Oral Roberts shouting, "Something good is

going to happen to you.” The impressionable young are often captivated by the enthusiasm and “go-get-em” atmosphere and are subjected to subversion of the truth more than they realize.

We have to realize that there are sponsoring churches whose leaders either do not know, do not want to know, do not care, or will not pay any attention to what is being preached by many today. They are either being led by their “promoter youth minister- pastor- preacher” or they have decided it is better to “go along” with error than to stand for the truth. You cannot warn some brethren of digression. Possibly they do not know enough about the truth to recognize heresy when it is presented. Whatever be their problem, they would like to indoctrinate our young with their doctrines and undermine the faith that sound parents, elders and preachers are trying to instill in their hearts.

We send a word of warning to brethren everywhere about these “great youth meetings.”

Know the speakers who are being set before the young before you send your young to them. When unsound men are on the program, why on earth encourage it anyway? The seeds that are being sown in these meetings will destroy the purity of the faith in the oncoming generation if allowed to continue.

What is being put forth as an interest in the young is the strenuous effort to cause the church to digress into apostate paths to the liking of the popular, compromising, unsound, denominational, “love-me-and-let-me-do-my-own-thing” philosophy. There are several of area wide meetings conducted over the end of the year, around holiday seasons, and other times. From what we have seen of the programs year after year, we find no reason for faithful brethren to give any endorsement to them whatsoever.

JWB



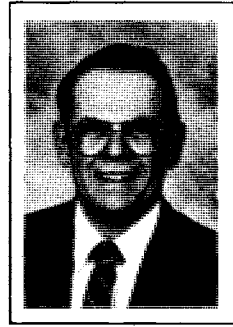
## **A Clean Slate**

Years ago children in school wrote their work on slates provided them. After a while the slate was full, possibly with various errors on it. But all that was easily remedied by wiping the slate clean and beginning with a clean slate.

When one sins he marks on his slate of life, making a blemish and stain. He cannot stand approved in that condition. God saw that and provided His only begotten Son to die on the cruel cross of Calvary so that people might come to Jesus Christ and by the blood of Christ have his slate wiped clean, so to speak. He could begin new and fresh as if he had never made his past mistakes.

What a marvelous and blessed thing God did for us! How could we ever repay Him for such a benefit? The fact is, we cannot repay Him. Nothing we can do would ever repay Him. But we can and do show our love and appreciation by coming to Christ, receiving the new start, and doing all that we can to keep from marking our slate with transgressions.

How about your slate? Have you come to the Lord to have it wiped clean? You cannot clean it by yourself. He waits to help you.



**JAMES W. BOYD**

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

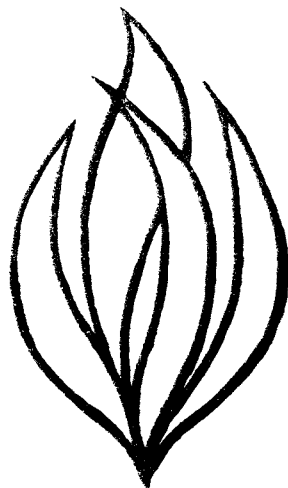
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# A Burning Fire



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

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## THIS ISSUE

### **Ten    Commandments**

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# ***First Commandment***

The words of the Ten Commandments have thundered across the centuries. They are based upon eternal and unchanging principles. They deal with fundamental matters of human behavior, forming a guide for the course of a normal and happy life. They have to do with the relationship between God and man and man with his fellowman. In an age where some contend everything is relative, the Ten Commandments present a certain, positive and negative, objective and absolute standard of righteousness. They are very broad in scope and the principles and specifics expressed are expressed in few words.

The heritage of the English speaking world reflects a respect for the Ten Commandments. The Decalogue serves as the basis for the legal system of modern law and order in the Western world. The preambles of forty-seven states acknowledge God's law as the basis for constitutional government. Our founding fathers of these United States recognized the authority and validity of the principles of the Ten Commandments. In many laws there is the recognition of the intent of them. But to honor God's law in the legislative halls with pious resolutions and constitutions is not enough. People must receive these truths into their hearts and walk accordingly.

Precisely when the Ten Commandments were given we are not informed except in relation to events recorded in Scripture. While archeological discoveries date them about fifteen centuries before Christ, the giving of them was at Sinai when God gave Israel His law by which that nation was to be governed until the coming of Christ, at which time they would no longer be the authority, giving way to the will of Christ. This event at Sinai was about fifteen centuries before Christ. Mount Sinai, in the range of the mountains of Horeb, is in the southern portion of the Arabian Peninsula between the two gulfs, Suez and Akaba.

## **Not From Men, But God**

Some have contended that the Ten Commandments were derived from a code written in Babylon called the Hammurabic Code which predates the Ten Commandments. Even though there be some similarities between them, the differences are more apparent necessitating the conclusion they came from

separate, and possibly opposite sources. That Code could reflect principles given by God years earlier in the Patriarchal Age which had been passed down. This would explain similarities.

Originally, the Ten Commandments were given audibly to Israel and later, at God's command, written on tablets of stone and given to Moses. They were given as the first part of the law of God given to Israel exclusively after Israel had been led from bondage out of Egypt and were on their way to the promised land of Canaan. They were given for Israel and their descendants until the coming of Christ. However, although nailed to the cross as was all the Law of Moses, nine of the ten have been incorporated into the will of Christ, the single exception being the command regarding the Sabbath, but even in the nine there are expansions in the will of Christ over the Ten Commandments that go further and deal with both acts and attitudes of heart from which actions flow. But just here we make the point that the principles of all ten, rightly divided, are found in the will of Christ and this we shall sufficiently prove as we discuss each commandment.

### **No Other Gods**

Exodus 20:3, *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me."* Jesus was asked by the Pharisees which is the greatest commandment (Mark 12:29-31). They asked hoping He would be unable to answer or that His answer might in some way alienate Him from those who might differ. Jesus spoke positively and plainly by saying, *"The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There in none other commandment greater than these."* Jesus was not giving the order of the Exodus record but the commandment upon which all others ultimately stand or fall. His answer reflects the acceptance of the first commandment in the order of Exodus that there must not be any other before God. This commandment is the foundation upon which the authority of everything else must rest. It is wrong to relegate God to a secondary place. Sin against our fellowman is wrong, not only because it is against our fellowman, but primarily it is against God. All moral duties of man are derived from God.



If a human being is nothing but a human animal and is only a more highly evolved form of beast, then why is it wrong to treat our fellowmen as we might some beast? Some do this very thing, unfortunately. Without this commandment there would be no basis upon which people should have respect for other people. There would be no authority to which people are amenable and accountable. Without this first commandment there would be no right or wrong, truth or error, or standard by which to determine anything to be authoritative.

### **Oneness of the Godhead**

The unity of Deity is affirmed. *"The Lord our God is one Lord."* To argue for the oneness of Deity does not negate the existence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as Deity. The Hebrew words translated "one" indicates a compound unity. It is used to define the husband and wife relationship becoming "one flesh." Even so, they remain two distinct persons. Genesis 11:6, *"Behold the people is one..."* refers to the citizens of the nation. But they remained distinct individual persons. So it is with the oneness of God. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit form the one Godhead, or Godhood, the one Deity, but they are three distinct divine persons. This oneness is affirmed in the commandment even at a time when polytheism was rampant in the world.

Israel was not the last people that needed this first commandment. Many pagan, heathen and otherwise false gods have been and are worshipped, possibly under different names than in yesteryear, but still in business nonetheless. William Jennings Bryan listed some modern gods as gold, fashion, fame, ease, intellect, travel, war, passion, change, drink, etc. But anything that absorbs the soul's attention away from God and claims uppermost affection in the heart is a god that displaces the true and living God and violates this law and commandment. This first commandment identifies the only rightful claimant to man's inner throne. There is none other than God. Nor can there be any substitute or co-regent with God.

There are other gods more noticeable in modern society. Some worship science. While we have good appreciation of science, the idea that science can and does displace God and that science can provide for all we need is folly. One has correctly said, "All our sciences are no more than tools to increase our power of getting whatever we already want. And

unless the supreme authority of God tells us how to use our new tools, we shall use them exactly as the savage uses the club, to beat out our neighbor's brains." All one must do to see the truth of this statement is to consider the world in which we live and note the abuses of the marvelous discoveries of science and how unprincipled men turn such things into threats against other people.

### **Some Other Gods**

Society, before which many bow, is a fickle god. This god does business under the guise of popularity and public opinion. To give the will of society precedence over the God-given values of right and wrong is spiritual suicide. *"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death."* (Proverbs 16:25).

Many will worship at the feet of the majority, pattern their very existence according to what they perceive everybody else is doing. They kneel before the pressures of the majority and the crowd, doing what they think they should to win the favor of people without proper regard to what God has taught us. Such a god as society is ever shifting itself, never stable, never reliable, never satisfying, always fleeting and so often dead wrong.

But who would deny there exists the god of self. There are infinite varieties of this god, all of which include selfishness, personal ambitions above and instead of righteousness, lusts, conceits, personal preferences serving as rule and standard. People can, and many are so inclined, to make themselves their own god. When this god takes the throne it demands the sacrifice of anything and everything, even the good, in order to be pleased. Living for oneself is the least pleasurable way of life. If one's neighbors do not get rid of him, he dies in boredom and lovelessness. Jesus commanded that this god come down from the throne. Matthew 16:24, 25, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."*

Closely akin to that last god is the god of humanity. It is a religion more commonly known today as Humanism. This religion recognizes nothing higher than man. There is no eternal authority to which one stands accountable. There is no god but only man. "Man is the most." This religion is only a modern echo of the devil's contention in Genesis 3:5, *"Ye shall be as*

gods, knowing good and evil."

## **Man is not God**

If man is god, what a miserable god he is! He is doomed to strut and fret during his brief hour on earth, then only doomed to die as does the brute beast and rot in the grave. Some god! He is unable to sustain his life or even live in peace with himself or others. What kind of mind would encourage us all to adopt a faith that is so inadequate, hopeless and unpromising? What wretched god is the god of man!

Ezekiel 28:2, "*Son of man, say unto the prince of Tyrus, Thus saith the Lord God, Because thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said I am as God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet thou art a man, and not God, though thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God.*" These words of condemnation of the evil and wicked ruler are applicable to any and all who hold the view that each one is accountable only to himself or to nothing higher than mankind generally. We are not our own lawgivers and judges.

Is it possible to include a complete list of the false gods men have and still worship? Probably not! Some worship the state, their children, businesses, rivers, money, animals, statues, knowledge, mountains, cows, beetles, serpents, crocodiles, you name it, probably some have it as a god to worship. Some even carve from wood and stone their gods. Once a soul turns from the true and living God of Heaven, there is no limit to which he can go in his continual making of gods.

Wherever civilizations have perished there has preceded that fall and destruction a turning from God. This has been noted in ancient history, in the darkness of the Gentile world, among the Jews, and is easily observed in the despair, havoc, ruin and turmoil in the world of our time.

The first commandment is still the first and shall ever be. May we worship the Lord God of Heaven. Nothing but sorrow can flow from any other course. Let us remove ourselves from all other gods, idolatry, that may tantalize us for they can only produce our spiritual disaster. "Our souls, O God, were made for thee, and never shall they rest until they rest in God."

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## **Second Commandment**

For many people the second of the Ten Commandments seems anticlimatic to the first. But it embraces thoughts more in detail regarding gods than did the first all-inclusive commandment. Exodus 20:4-6, *"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments."* The unfortunate attitudes taken by many regarding the teaching of this commandment has torn asunder the faith of Christ and created a never ending number of "sacred" images as well as extreme positions that denounce all pictures of any kind of anything.

Just what does this negative commandment forbid? It obviously refers to worship that is related to images, religious images. The context of the passage, and Exodus 20:23, *"Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold,"* shows that it forbids images that are to represent and denote Deity. It does not forbid the making of all images. It prohibits bowing oneself before images, worshipping them or using them to worship God. It forbids the making of them for such purposes.

Men cannot know what the spiritual image of Deity looks like anyway and they are forbidden to create such things as if they represent Deity. Who can picture his own spiritual image, let alone that of God? Such is a futile attempt and the attempt is forbidden by this second commandment.

### **Even Pictures?**

Some have taken this thought to the exclusion of all religious pictures, art, statues, etc. This does not forbid aesthetic arts, nor all religious pictures. It depends on the art and the picture and how it is used. Art that intends to depict Deity is forbidden. Nothing here outlaws pictures of mere human beings, or representations of a human being. What of the pictures some

draw of Jesus? While Jesus is Deity, He was also humanity, fleshly, while here on earth. Only that which represents His humanity is in keeping with this commandment. To attempt to draw the Deity of Jesus would be wrong. Christ plainly had a human and visible form. We know not what that was nor His personal appearance. We are confident that what we usually see, Jesus with long hair as if He was some early day "hippie," is out of keeping with the teaching of Paul regarding long hair on men (First Corinthians 11:14). Neither do we know the personal appearances of Mary, Paul, Peter or any other of the New Testament characters, or even the animals upon which the Lord rode into Jerusalem. That which is forbidden is the making of images that try to depict Deity that we simply cannot depict by physical art. We are forbidden to bow before such things or use such things to stand instead of the One before whom we do bow. Is not this the very fault Israel committed when Moses was on Mount Sinai and Aaron fashioned the golden calf? They knew the calf was not God, but they bowed themselves before that which represented God and that was sinful.

### **Use of Images**

The advocates of images claim they do not worship the image, and only use the image to worship what the image represents. This is what Israel was doing. Paul called that very thing idolatry (First Corinthians 10:7). Not only is the worship forbidden, even bowing before the images, but presenting something as if it represented God for the purpose of worship is likewise forbidden.

John was even forbidden to bow before an angel (Revelation 22:8,9). Peter forbade Cornelius to bow before him and worship him (Acts 10:25, 26). In spite of such teaching and examples we find many still bowing before their images, worshipping men, kissing their rings and statues, etc. Rather than realizing God made man in His image some have attempted to make an image of God in keeping with their own desires.

There were many great thinkers, writers and religious leaders who seriously protested during the first four centuries against any image making. Imagery was one of the many ideas of paganism that gradually was adopted into what was called "Christianity." It was a part of the process of digression and apostasy from the truth. To avoid even the appearance or confusion with idolatry, no statues were placed in the buildings

used by early churches (Short History of the Catholic Church, page 65). The man the Catholic Encyclopedia calls the Father of Church History called the use of images a "heathen custom." Imagery is not authorized in the New Testament but is forbidden as idolatry. It is the result of apostate doctrines and a carry-over of pagan superstition.

The extent to which some advocates of images have gone is seen in the difference between the presentation of the Ten Commandments in the Catholic catechisms and what is read in Exodus twenty in the Catholic Bible. In the catechism commandment number two is left out and two commandments are made of the tenth commandment in order to make ten. But in the Catholic Bible the second commandment still stands. Show this to your Catholic friends and ask for an explanation. You may open the eyes of some to the fallacy of their faith.

### **Biblical Images**

We must realize, however, that advocates of images will cite what they call Biblical examples of image making and their use. They remind you that Moses was told to make an altar and place above it cherubim. These were winged creatures in the likeness of man, bird and angel. The high priests bowed before them as God directed. But has God directed such bowing before images that have come from man's design and origin? God designed the cherubim. Only the priest bowed before them. This is not a parallel to what some advocate today.

They remind you that Moses made a brazen serpent at God's command. This was for the people to behold when bitten by fiery serpents to prevent death. But there is a tremendous difference. God commanded its construction as a means to show His power. The people did not worship before it. When they began to do that it was destroyed (Second Kings 18:4) when good king Hezekiah was producing a great religious revival and causing the people to return to the Lord. It was broken into pieces because the people had begun to burn incense to it. Is there a difference in this from burning candles before the image of Mary, even an image never authorized of God for any purpose?

Often we hear that Christ never mentioned the Second Commandment. It is true that He did not mention it with the same words Moses used. But what His apostles taught was by His authority. Listen to Paul as He thundered against images in

Acts 17:29. Who can doubt the will of Christ in light of such teaching? In spite of this record, many will perpetuate the religious lie that there is a connection between an image and God that God approves. This form of idolatry is among the evils of the Gentiles in the pre-Christian age which Paul cited denoting their degeneracy (Romans 1:18-25).

### **Why Is It Wrong?**

Just why is it wrong to bow before and worship an image? It is because God has forbidden it and this is reason enough. But even our own reasoning should show why. To have to have an image means that our spiritual senses are dull. No man living in daily communion with God needs a picture to help him worship God. If a man craves such help he lacks a spiritual consciousness. A truly spiritual worshipper needs an image to help him no more than a man with perfect vision needs glasses. Worship is not sensual, but from the heart. Conceptions of God cannot be realized by imagery unauthorized of God and are, therefore, not subject to visualization in art or painting. God is light, love, truth, kindness, grace, mercy and Spirit. Such cannot be transformed into any production by man.

To briefly summarize the main points of the Second Commandment, remember it forbids worshipping and bowing before images that represent Deity. It goes further to forbid the making of images representing Deity. It does not forbid all images for all purposes, but those that are intended to represent Deity and for the purpose of worship. But the Old and New Testament forbid the idolatry it is. Imagery cannot depict Deity and is incapable of doing so and man ought not even try.

When one is tempted to bow before man or image, our hearts and mouths cry out, "Stand up," even as Peter exclaimed to Cornelius. May God enlighten our hearts through His revealed Word that men will lift their bodies from all prostrations before men and human devices and lift their eyes and hearts on high where the Lord God forever lives and reigns. Then He shall be pleased and we shall be approved before Him.

† † † † †

***May God bless you in 1989.***

# **Third Commandment**

Exodus 20:7, *"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain."*

How marvelous is the name of the Lord God! The name of God would include all the various titles that define and describe His nature, His truth, His attributes, His character and authority. It would embrace identifications of His purpose and providence. The name of God signifies all that God is, all that He does and commands.

His name is holy. Psalm 111:9, *"Holy and reverend is his name."* His name is to be revered as that which is sacred. Isaiah 57:15 also defines the name of God as holy, worthy of reverence. Nehemiah 9:5, *"Blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted in all the earth, who has set thy glory above the heavens."*

God's name and that of His Son, who is a person of Deity, a member of the Godhead, is often mentioned in a way and manner requiring the highest adoration and affection. Not only is that true in this third commandment, but also in such passages as Matthew 6:9, *"After this manner therefore pray ye; Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name."* Philippians 2:9, *"Wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name."*

His name signifies His authority. It is the only name under heaven whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12). What we do in word or deed is to be done *"in the name of,"* which means by His authority, the Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17).

## **Nothing in a Name**

There are those who say there is nothing in a name. They have a reason for saying that. They try to defend the utterly anti-Christian system of denominationalism and suggest that the various names being used by various religions are mere tags and labels without significance. If they really believe that, why are they not willing to sacrifice names they have chosen to wear which are not Biblical and accept that which is authorized without addition or subtraction? But it is obvious that those who would contend thusly in religion do not accept the unimportance



of names in any other realm of human venture. It is not true regarding the products we buy, what appears on our paychecks, the places we go, the people we meet, or how we name our children. Everyone is mindful not only of his own name but the names of others. It matters. It matters to God as well about names and we would do well to admit it.

God gave many names and even changed many names. He called Adam, Jesus and John by the names He assigned. He changed the name of Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, Jacob to Israel. He has given the disciples of Christ the name Christian. How dare any man contend there is nothing in a name when the Lord God of heaven has indicated otherwise! The name of Jesus was given by God through the archangel Gabriel. *"Thou shalt call his name Jesus."* Did it matter what they named the child? Therefore, let us not trifle with the name of God, use it vainly or irreverently, flippantly and even connected with profanity.

### **An Expansion**

Christ expanded on the third commandment when He taught His disciples to pray. The third commandment says not to take God's name in vain, which is a prohibition and a negative approach toward honoring the name of God. Jesus presented a similar truth by the positive approach and taught the name of God was to be hallowed, meaning revered, adored, praised and honored. It is not enough under Christ to simply refrain from misusing God's name, but it is incumbent on those who will be saved to present His name properly.

There are a number of ways the third commandment can be violated. It is transgressed with profanity, cursing, swearing, which are base and low vices. Such only reveals uncouth minds and the admitted inability to express oneself without stooping as low as man can stoop in speech. George Washington issued an order on July 4, 1775, "The General most earnestly requires and expects a due observance of those articles of war, established for the government of the army, which forbid profane cursing, swearing and drunkenness." Earlier he had written, "Witness how much I have both by threats and persuasive means, endeavored to discountenance gaming, drinking, swearing and irregularities of every kind." One could devoutly wish today that all men of public life would follow the direction and example of our first president. He recognized that

the name of God is holy and reverend.

### **No Small Matter**

How terribly guilty is that soul that trifles with the holy name of God! Is not God's name heard often in the market place being used in shameless profanity and vulgarity by young and old, male and female? The name of God is man's last and only hope. When death strikes, when in pain, agony or grief, when the heart is broken and dreams have been smashed because of want and despair, when overcome by destitution, when strength has been drained into weakness and youth gone into old age, when joys have faded and glorious grown dim, the only One to whom we can turn with confidence and call upon for that which we need is the glorious name of God. Will a person profane that very name? Why will he? Surely, he is prompted by a certain form of near insanity. Profanity relieves no pain, gratifies no appetite. It is not considered honorable by the good or the evil. It is a manifestation of the tongue gone beserk and the mind running wild without control.

Some have tried to diminish the enormity of guilt of profanity by contending that the person misusing the name of God does not really mean what he says. This may be true that he does not fully grasp his enormous sin. But that only compounds his guilt. Calling on God without sincerity is utmost folly. Calling on God to do things in a whimsical fashion suggests the height of disrespect. Profanity even suggests that God just might do what He has said He will not do, thereby, a gross misrepresentation of God. It is to slander Deity.

It is a serious thing to call upon God to damn anyone or anything. If a man be damned it will be because of his own faults. Man's wickedness destroys him for he casts himself against God's righteousness. God will be his judge. But we err to profanely cry for God to damn someone as an outburst of our anger and hatred.

Another violation of the third commandment is in the frivolous, light and flippant use of sacred names. Some do this to adorn their amusing and entertaining stories. Isaiah said some "*make mention of God... but not in truth, nor in righteousness.*" Oddly, this violation is committed often by professed believers who doubtless would rather honor God. They know not what they do!

Those who pray, "*Hallowed be thy name,*" should hallow it

by mentioning His name only with reverence and respect for Him. The early scribes did not even write the name of Jehovah when copying ancient manuscripts except they went through rituals designed to hallow His name. Some would write His name but never with a pen that had written anything else previously and never use the pen again for anything thereafter. While these forms of respect are not required, it is a manifestation of the respect that many have had toward the name of God in days past. A dose of this attitude would be a great breath of fresh air in our world today.

### **Hypocrisy Violates**

Although not often considered, but certainly true, hypocrisy violated the third commandment. Is it not reprehensible for a man to say, "Lord, Lord," but rebel against the Word of the Lord, refusing to obey His commandments? When prayers are uttered to God but worded to please men rather than God, when people give alms to be seen of men, when they outwardly go through rituals but in life dismiss the law of God, is this not a mockery of His name, even blasphemous?

We also understand that the presumptuous use of God's name is to profane it and violate this third commandment. Pretending to do something in His name, by His authority, when He has not so authorized that thing, is to misuse His name. To simply say we do something in the name of the Lord does not make it so (Matthew 25). We must do what we do in His name, by His authority, or we have no right to use His name in connection with it. Not every high-sounding operation flourishing under the alleged banner of Christ is actually of the Master. How many times do religious people operate under His name, but they have not received direction or permission from the Lord to assume they have His authority?

In Acts 19:7, some were shouting the name of Jesus and calling upon His name to do certain things they desired. But they were not of God and were thereby abusing the holy name of Deity.

Just as the Decalogue thunders against those who would profane God's name, we would remind ourselves that this also would include the name of Christ. How often we are subjected to the vile tongue of many around us by hearing the name of our blessed Savior used and abused in the slanderous and wicked speech that characterizes so many! Loose jest, idle

words, insincere oaths, vulgar stories that are connected with the name of Jesus is no less a sin than a similar action connected with the name of the Father or the Holy Spirit. Ten times Jesus is called "God." Even though He became man as we are men, we recognize the two-fold nature of Him while on earth as humanity and Deity. The name of Jesus Christ is not to be misused. It seems this is the norm, however, for so many.

### **Hallowed be Thy Name**

The opposite of profaning the name of God and taking it in vain is to hallow His name. Let us therefore hallow His name in worship, and by serving Him daily in meekness and fear or respect, trusting Him and obeying His commands. Those who genuinely reverence the name of the Lord will not wish to ever use it in vain but rather will be outraged and deeply offended with others around do so. Let us not let the violators of this divine teaching cause us to lose our sensitivity when the name of Deity is violated.

Psalm 69:30, *"I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving."* Psalm 96:2, *"I sing unto the Lord a new song, bless his name."* Psalm 148:5, *"Let them praise the name of the Lord for he commanded, and they were created."* Psalm 145:21, *"My mouth shall speak the praise of the Lord, and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever."*

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## **Fourth Commandment**

Exodus 20:8-11, *"Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it."* This is the commandment of our study.

The Jewish Sabbath was observed on our Saturday, the seventh day of the week. The word "sabbath" means seventh,

taken from the Hebrew word meaning a day of rest. Three main principles are borne in this fourth commandment: (1) the principle of rest from honest labor; (2) the principle of a rhythmic pattern of perpetual worship; (3) the principle of work itself.

### **To Israel at Sinai**

Originally the Sabbath was given to the Israelite nation. There is no evidence that Adam, Abraham or others who lived prior to the giving of the Law of Moses at Mount Sinai observed the Sabbath. Genesis 2:3, *"God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it, because that in it he had rested from all his work."* But the question is, did God sanctify that day immediately upon completion of His creative work, or later when He gave the Law of Moses? We must remember that Moses wrote Genesis 2:3 several years after the Ten Commandments were given to Israel. There is no indication that the early patriarchs knew anything about observing the Sabbath Day.

Further evidence to consider is that this commandment is said to have been given at Sinai, as recorded in Nehemiah 9:13, 14, *"Thou camest down also upon mount Sinai and spaketh with them from heaven, and gavest them right commandments, and true laws, 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."* This tells us these commandments were made known at Sinai.

### **Reason For It**

The reason God required observance of the Sabbath is stated in Deuteronomy 5:15, *"And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out from thence through a mighty hand and a stretched out arm; therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the sabbath day."* Because they had labored, worked, slaved so long and been deprived of worship and rest by the heathens, God gave them this Sabbath.

The Sabbath was exclusively for the Israelites because God said, *"It is a sign between me and the children of Israel..."* (Exodus 31:17). The entire Law of Moses, including these Ten Commandments, was given just to the Israelite nation.

More than the seventh day weekly observance was involved

for the Jews. Leviticus 26:2, "*Ye shall keep my sabbaths... I am the Lord.*" The plural, sabbaths, is used extensively in the Old Testament. God's name is joined to all of them. In the course of fifty years the number of sabbaths the Jews were to observe totaled nearly sixteen years, more than a fourth of the time. There was not only the Sabbath each week, but the Passover, the day of first fruits, the feast of trumpets, the feast of the tabernacles, the Sabbath of years, the year of Jubilee and the days of atonement. Little wonder Paul later described the old law as a "*yoke of bondage*" and a yoke "*which neither our father nor we were able to bear.*" Furthermore, the restrictions concerning the Sabbath were severe and violations brought severe punishments. There was to be no work, not even gathering sticks for a fire, no cooking, no travel.

### **What of Us and Now**

We might wonder where is the application of the fourth commandment upon Christians? It is not binding upon Christians, except in the principles it demonstrates, because the old covenant was to extend, as God said to the Jews, "*through your generations.*" This limited the extent of the Jewish dispensation. Whereas every other of the Ten Commandments is included or expanded upon in the new covenant of which Christ is mediator, it is significant that the command to remember the Sabbath is not included anywhere. The fourth is an exception in this matter. As we have said before, so say we now again, the reason we believe and accept the other commandments is not because God gave them to the Jews through Moses, but because Christ included them in His will. We are to obey them because of the authority of God through Christ, not because of the authority of God through Moses.

Is it not true that Jesus observed the Sabbath? He did, because He lived under the Law of Moses as a Jew. He never bound its observance upon His followers after the coming of the kingdom of heaven, however.

Christ, His apostles and the early Christians worked, rested and worshipped. It would be intemperate to do otherwise. But this was not in observance of the Sabbath. The early Christians assembled on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; First Corinthians 16:1, 2). It was that day that they partook of the Lord's Supper and gave of their means. The first day of the week was the day of the week that Christ arose from the dead;

the day that the church began on Pentecost; and these facts are attested in the inspired Scriptures as well as secular history. There is nothing in the faith of Christ that includes the observance of the Sabbath Day.

We see then the distinction between the fourth commandment and all the others. The other nine are included or expanded in the will of Christ, but this one is limited, and omitted, except for the principles it teaches which we have already noted.

### **Regarding Work**

No study of the fourth commandment would be complete without at least a passing attention being given to the words regarding work. *"Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work."*

Rest from work implies that there first must be work from which one can rest. The necessity of work is borne out in the new covenant of Jesus Christ. Henry Van Dyke wrote, "This is the gospel of labor; Ring it ye bells of the kirk (church, JB), The Lord of love come down from above, To dwell with the men who work."

Man's good and happiness is connected with work. Eden was not a place of idleness but of work. *"The Lord God took man and put him in the Garden of Eden to dress it and keep it."*

(Genesis 2:15). There is even activity in heaven. In Jacob's dream the angels were not idle but ascending and descending the ladder he envisioned. Jesus is preparing mansions for those who shall enter therein. There is activity in heaven. Jesus worked on earth. *"My Father worketh even until now and I work."* We are children of a working God and beneficiaries of a working Savior. We should honor their calling by a life of diligent and faithful work. Paul taught if one would not work he should not eat (Second Thessalonians 3:10). It is important to note that the same commandment which speaks of a day of rest also speaks of six days of labor. While many offer much talk, concern and emphasis on the rest, there may not have been sufficient emphasis on the other six days.

### **False Philosophy**

The philosophy entertained in the minds of too many is to do less and less and receive more and more. This ultimately has its limits. It may be difficult to determine which is the more reprehensible, the professional, willful loafer and shirker, or a

governmental system which harbors and encourages such behavior. James Vance said, "God is on the side of the worker. The worker has rights. The willful idler has none, whether he belong to the idle rich or the idle poor."

To ignore God's decree calling for man to work is as wrong as any other violation of His will. Nothing worthwhile has been built by people that tried to do as little as they could, but by those who try to do as much as they can. Consider our own great nation. Our land is great because God has blessed us, but this blessing has been given in response to work. This nation affords the greatest freedoms on earth, such as the freedom of worship and religion. But these freedoms are ours because they were accomplished, with God's providence, by long, hard, sacrificial work. It is fair to raise the question whether the attitudes of doing less and less for more and more will preserve for us these precious liberties we have inherited. If our enemies outwork us they shall outlast us. This is according to God's divine principles of labor.

Relaxation and leisure have their place and in their place they are proper and right. There are serious and justifiable questions being raised whether the increase of leisure has been beneficial to society or detrimental. A tragic paradox of our nation is that the very blessings of God that have brought us to prosperity and strength are being so abused and misused that they may become our undoing because they give rise to increased laziness, slothfulness and lack of the sense of personal responsibility to work. With fewer and fewer working days, much fewer than known among the Jews, what an oddity that the man with only one day of rest found it easier to attend worship and be attentive to spiritual matters than our own generation which is given usually two days of rest, shorter days to work, and more days off work than has ever been known.

Those who violate the principles of the fourth commandment are willful idlers, neglectors of worship, who have secularized the day of worship for their worldly pursuits. The Lord's will regarding work is broader than most consider. But the Lord's will regarding worship is not to be set aside for labor and the mundane, secular and world activities.

### **A Big Misconception**

A common fallacy among us is the assumption that labor has only to do with the man that works with his hands. This has



become a connotation with many that is unjustified. To labor refers to the man who works with his hands, but also to the thinker who works with his mind, the statesman, preacher, planner, clerk, salesman, writer, artist, engineer, doctor, whose labor is not all physical but possibly more mental than physical. Regardless of one's honorable occupation the law of God regarding labor applies. All who live harmoniously with the principles of the fourth commandment will work, rest and worship.

Some complain, "*Sunday is the only day I have.*" They use this as an excuse for not worshipping God and attending to matters they prefer to do. But quite the opposite is true. Sunday may well be the only day you do not have. It is the Lord's Day. While we do not observe Sunday as did the Jews the Sabbath, there are certain duties to be discharged on Sunday we dare not overlook. In one sense all days belong to the Lord. But because of our duty of worship, Sunday is especially a day when we should plan to do what we are taught to do regarding worship. To omit worship and use the day for the satisfaction of other appetites is to miss the teaching and principles of the fourth commandment.

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## ***Second John 9 - 11***

The Holy Spirit used the apostle John to send a short letter to one identified as the "*elect lady and her children.*" Whether this referred to a specific woman and her physical children or to a congregation is a matter that is disputed. Regardless of which it is, the truth taught in the epistle is what matters to us.

Earlier in the letter, prior to our text, John had stressed how they loved the truth, were in the truth and walked in truth and he rejoiced in this fact. He previously emphasized truth, love and self-examination. Now he warns of deceivers in the world as he had done in First John 4:1, "*Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*" It made a difference to John, to Deity, and should to us, whether one taught truth or error.

John's three letters denounced those who denied that Christ

had come in the flesh and denied His Deity, the basic fundamental and foundational truth upon which all else about the faith is founded. He called such people anti-Christ, which means to be against Christ and what He taught. When one opposes and resist what Christ taught He opposes Christ (John 12:48). One rejects Christ by refusing to receive His words.

John prefaced his warning with the admonition to examine self. "*Look to yourselves...*" (verse 8). This is similar to Paul's warning to the Ephesian elders recorded in Acts 20:28. Both warnings imply the possibility of apostasy and the necessity of constantly being vigilant, alert, attentive and on guard. God wants His children to remain faithful (Revelation 2:10). But this faithfulness demands knowledge of the truth, belief of the truth, and practice of the truth. It also requires resistance, opposition, exposure and disposal of error. We must realize the destructiveness of error and the evil nature of false teachers, however well-meaning they may be or appear to be. One big mistake some make is to treat error too lightly and minimize how deadly it really is to the soul.

In our text (please take your New Testament and read), John, often called the apostle of love, presents a broad and sweeping principle regarding our attitude and action toward false doctrines and those who advocate them. His teaching deals with fellowship with God and the faithful. His words, certainly prompted by love, are strong, severe and exacting.

### **Whosoever**

In verse nine, John says, "*Whosoever.*" Who is included? There is no partiality to this universal application. None are excluded. As in Revelation 22:17, Romans 10:13 and Matthew 19:9, the text applies to all. Some act as if some teaching does not apply to their friends, family or favorites. But it includes the prominent as well as the lesser lights, the rich and the less affluent, even those outside the kingdom as well as those in the kingdom, also those who may once were faithful but who now teach error alongside truth. This teaching includes me. As you may well guess my next comment, it includes you and yours.

### **Transgresseth and Abideth Not**

The word "*transgresseth*" means to cut across, go beyond, exceed the limits. It is present tense which signifies a continued

action rather than a one time violation. Unfortunately, some confuse progression with digression. A cigarette ad appealing to women to smoke says, "You've come a long way, baby." That is true. But in which direction? It matters because there are boundaries beyond which we dare not go. While we are not in the line-drawing business, Christians are in the business of recognizing and respecting lines that God has already drawn. Some berate standing still and call for movement. But all movement is not necessarily good. If one does not abide in the doctrine of Christ, remain within its boundaries and limits, but goes outside of them, the consequences are lethal.

### **Doctrine**

The "*doctrine of Christ*" means what Christ taught or His teaching. It is not just teaching about Christ, although this is certainly included. But it means the teaching He brought, what He taught personally and that which was taught and revealed by His authority as men were guided by the Holy Spirit. It is similar to the phrase, doctrine of Balaam, doctrine of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:14, 15) and the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42). It means what they taught. This text includes what Jesus taught on any subject and whatever He commanded (verse 6). His doctrine is the only authority and standard by which to measure. It even includes the text under consideration.

### **Result**

The result of transgressing and abiding not in the doctrine is, as John states, one "*hath not God.*" Do you realize how serious this is? This is spiritually deadly. One is severed from God, has no fellowship with God and is in condemnation. Strong word from the apostle of love! Such words are similar to those written by Paul in Galatians 1:6- 9 where an "*anathema*" or "*accursed*" is pronounced on those who teach a different gospel.

On the other hand, those who do abide, remain within the limits and confines of His doctrine, have both the Father and the Son. It is impossible to have the Father without the Son and vice versa (John 5:23; First John 2:23). This means the doctrine is inclusive, exclusive, restrictive, narrow, demanding and exacting with borders. Who shall say otherwise? This is plain, clear, unambiguous and certain. We either accept it or we reject it, but we cannot change nor alter it.

Not only are we not to traffic in false doctrine, John instructs us regarding those who do. Verse ten has the word “if.” John anticipated those who would teach false teaching and gives instructions how to deal with them. We cannot totally prevent people from teaching error, but there is something we can and must do regarding them and their error. We are prohibited from giving them “*godspeed*,” literally a favorable greeting that is supportive of them or even implies and appears to be an endorsement of them. We cannot condone nor be indifferent toward them and the error they teach. While we are never to be rude, we can have no fellowship with them nor leave the impression we wish them success or consider them sound in the faith. We are to have no fellowship with darkness (Ephesians 5:11), but even that is not all. This same verse teaches we are to reprove that darkness. One who is a false teacher cannot be supported and accepted into one’s company. There is no difficulty in understanding this. The problem arises regarding our will to obey.

### **Godspeed**

John tells us why it is so necessary not to bid “*godspeed*” to those who teach error. We become partakers with them in promoting false doctrine. In Third John, verses one through eight, John noted how Gaius helped faithful brethren and in so doing helped the truth. Conversely, to help a false teacher is to help error. We cannot even appear to do so. There is a validity to the charge of guilt by association. Even though Christ at times did associate with sinners, He never said or did anything that advanced their cause, but rather condemned their error. and taught them the truth that would correct their error. It is ridiculous to think Christ would be in the company of false teachers to assist them in their growth as some weak and digressive liberal brethren are willing to do today. Tragically, those who do assist false teaching are also seen before youth rallies, lectureships, in pulpits and on pages of publications by by churches that profess faithfulness. This is gross inconsistency and error! If one does not want to be guilty of the charge of guilt by association, he may well need to change his associates.

Ironically, some reject the teaching to reject false teachers and the ones they reject are those who reject false teachers. Some support error by constantly berating and criticizing those who oppose false doctrines.

## **Go - Along- ism Demonstrated**

Second John 9 -11 forbids a very prominent sin among brethren that is rightly described as "go- along- ism." Some continue their association with those who openly teach error. They encourage them and condone, use them and promote them. They run in their pack, are found at their functions, numbered in their company, even encouraging young and old to sit at their feet, generally playing Peter when he showed cowardice and attempted neutrality by warming himself at the fires of the enemy of Christ.

There are so many demonstrations among us of the violation of this passage. Some conduct joint services with denominations, promote their works in growth seminars. One preacher even rang the bell for the Salvation Army as a good-will gesture. While that organization does much good, as do most denominations, it is an avowed denomination that teaches errors such as salvation by faith alone and the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. Consider the willingness of many to continue fellowship with the advocates of the modern dance, Masonry, social drinking, adultery, premillennialism, unity in diversity, Crossroadism, the use of the instrument of music in worship, accepting the Christian Church denomination, the absurdity of imitating instruments by the voice, and on and on. How could one violate Second John 9- 11 if going along with such doctrines, practices and advocates of them does not violate it?

False teachers are invited for gospel meetings, youth rallies, even though their doctrinal errors are pointed out repeatedly. False teachers generally cry they are misunderstood or taken out of context. The truth of the matter is they are understood and their errors are compounded because of the context. Some excuse their sin of helping false teachers by saying many others are using these people. So what? Is truth or the crowd our standard? Others say, when a false teacher is exposed, that they have already invited him and it is too late to cancel him. Such insipid and cowardly treason to the cause of Christ is characteristic of many who like to profess faithfulness to Christ but who show their disloyalty to Him.

## **Other Violations**

Some who preach even join denominational ministerial associations, fluently quote from false teachers, continue to

support schools, Bible deparatment, papers and others who teach error. Some churches are controlled by men who are called elders who seemingly cannot take a breath lest they first check with some editor, college president or so-called "scholar" who has drunk deeply from the waters of denominational and modernistic apostasy and heresy. Some elders they are!

It is not love to go-along with error. It is treason. Bidding Godspeed to those who teach error defies John's writing. While some wail pitifully that we may have lost confidence in them, how can you retain confidence in those who surrender and compromise, showing repeatedly they are unwilling to stand for the truth and willing to ignore what is not theirs to compromise! Churches once known to stand for truth against the invasion of digression have turned the other way and are now part of the digression. The desire to follow the crowd, be big, be accepted, be counted among the pack has provoked many who preach and multitudes of men called elders to place the dagger of betrayal into the backs of faithful brethren and the cause of Christ. Some know not what they do, but others know what they do because they have been shown what they are doing.

What can be done about this sorry situation is difficult to determine, but one fact is certain. God will not hold people who transgress and abide not in the doctrine guiltless. Nor will He declare righteous those who bid Godspeed to such false teachers. What provokes a person who says he loves the Lord, loves the brethren, loves the church, loves the lost, to just go-along with those who teach error, those who send forth an uncertain and unsound sound, who mix truth with error and deceive the people? The truth is they stand condemned before God because they are lacking in spiritual backbone to stand up for Jesus and be His loyal soldier. This traitorous attitude is sapping the life out of the church of our time. Those who should be standing against digression have themselves joined the digression.

### **Will to Obey**

The difficulty with Second John 9- 11 is not understanding its meaning. It is possessing the willingness to believe and obey it. Many brethren simply ignore and dismiss it as if it has been removed from Scripture. Others only give it lip service. They do the "passover" and refuse to pay attention to it. Their rules of

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fellowship are determined by friends, family, fame, fortune, fanfare, finances and their favorites rather than THE FAITH. Only when brethren learn this passage and respect it will the advance of digression among us be slowed. Then we shall see the cessation of support for schools, papers, speakers, lectureships, youth rallies, programs, promotions etc. where those who teach error are condoned, coddled, promoted and featured. Will that day ever come? With most, probably not! History tells us that. But that day has already come and will ever remain with those who are resolved to be truly faithful to God. Whether you will be of this good company is your own decision.

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***Plans call for discussions of the remaining of the Ten Commandments to appear in the next two issues. The length of the lessons determined how and when each discussion could appear. We hope you will look for them and profit from them. JB***

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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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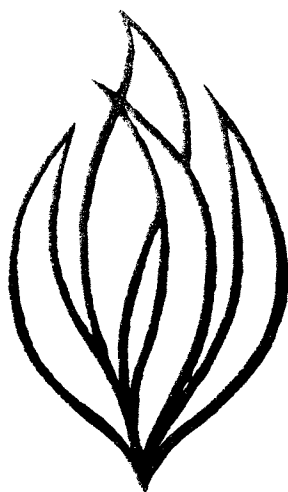
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# A Burning Fire



*"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).*



## THIS ISSUE

### **Ten Commandments**

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# **Fifth Commandment**

Exodus 20:12, *"Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee."*

Charity is not the only thing that begins at home. Thoughtfulness, truthfulness, honesty, uprightness, good citizenship and respect for authority all begin in the home. Lawlessness often begins in the home because there one can learn to disrespect authority as well as learn to respect it. If the world is ever going to be a better place there first must be better homes. The lesson regarding the home from the Word of God must be learned and practiced. So much of the degenerate behavior seen in our world can be attributed to the collapse of the home and its falling away from being what God ordained it should be.

The welfare and salvation of society rests in the family and the reconstruction of family virtues and values, parental authority and responsibility, and the obedience of children to their parents. There is much disrespect toward the older on the part of the younger, and much of this is because of the disrespectful way many who are older have conducted their lives, treated their mates and their children.

The family is the nucleus and spring of society. There can be no spiritually and morally sound nation unless such is characteristic of the home. It is also true that there can be no sound church unless there is soundness in the home because the influence of the home, generally speaking, is greater than that of the church. The home often determines the direction of the church rather than the other way around. The state and the church are both ordained of God, as is the family. The home was instituted in Eden's purity and sinlessness and is the oldest of God's institutions. The home heavily influences both state and church, even though influences go both ways.

## **A God-Given Provision**

The fifth commandment, learned, believed and obeyed is one of the surest safeguards, a near guarantee, for correct and righteous human behavior. It gives the blueprint for the reign of law and order. It makes possible a life of peace, security and happiness. It will provide, especially for the young, that solid

foundation upon which life can be built and lived as God would have it. When children obey their parents they learn to obey those in charge of schools, government officials, employers, and all others with whom they will have to deal in life. While children obey parents they are doing more than learning the right ways and obeying parents. They are obeying a distinct command and expectation of God. All just authority echoes the voice of God. Our holy obligation as children of God is to obey God. The child's holy obligation to parents bears the imprint of the God-man relationship.

### **By Example and Decree**

Christ set the example for honoring parents. Luke 2:51, He went down to Nazareth and *"he was subject unto them."* His first miracle was undertaken at the request of His mother. As He died on the cross He remarked, *"Woman behold thy son,"* and to another (probably John) He said, *"Behold thy mother."* In this fashion, even as His life was going from Him, He showed care and concern for His mother and instigated the means for her continued provisions in this life.

This fifth commandment is bound upon the Christian by apostolic authority. Ephesians 6:1-4, *"Children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. Honor thy father and mother; [which is the first commandment with promise] that it may be well with thee and thou mayest live long on the earth. And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."* The obligation children have to parents is not a one-way street. Parents have obligations to their children. There is no law of God that says children must obey their parents in doing that which is wicked. Many parents are not respected because they are not respectable. To be honored one must strive to be honorable. Parents must in some measure earn and deserve respect as well as demand it. Parents earn it and children learn it. It is futile to expect children to respect parental authority when the same parents do not have respect for divine authority.

Paul's comment on this commandment was, *"For this is right."* It will ever be right to honor and obey parental authority. Parents who have served God and their offsprings with patience, devotion, sacrifice, self-denial (even of necessities), provided the physical and medical care for their children, prayed for them without ceasing, toiled without intermission, hoped through

good times and bad, lavished their children with genuine love akin to the love God has for His children, such parents (and there be many of this quality) are entitled to the highest place of living honor, second only to the honor we offer unto Deity. To fail to obey and honor such parents is to sin against God by defying His commandment.

### **Dishonorable Parents**

Parents who are indeed worthy of honor may reap life's richest rewards, but the unworthy parent who has set a sordid example before his or her young can well expect to reap as they have sown, also. Many "parents" are deserting their own flesh and blood, abusing their own children, even maiming and killing them, casting them off as if they were nothing. Many deprive them of the barest needs because of parental degeneracy like drunkenness, being a "social butterfly" and the seeker of fame and fortune of their own careers, flitting hither and yon, attending to everything their own selfishness demands at the overwhelming cost of leaving the care and upbringing of their children to some other. No less are the sins of the irreligious, profane, worldly, godless and indifferent parents who take no thought for the spiritual welfare of their children, but who may, at the same moment of spiritual neglect, lavish material abundance upon them. What a vast horde of unworthy parents are marching across the scene of history in our time and we are seeing daily the disastrous results of such conduct in the lives of people of every age.

### **Extention of Honor**

What many seemingly have never learned or forgotten is that duty to parents does not end with childhood days at home and under parental supervision. Christ rebuked some adults who dishonored their parents when their parents were dependent on them (Matthew 15:1-9). They were giving to God but neglecting the care and provision of their parents which was also commanded by God. Christ condemned such inconsistency and accused them of making God's Word null and void and displacing the commandments of God to conform to their own traditions. They committed the mistake of making secondary duty a priority over a primary one.

Providing the necessary care of parents in their old age, when

they are sick, when they can no longer provide for themselves, is as much a duty God has given children as for children to obey parents when the children are young. There may not be found some ideal way to provide the special care some parents may need. Being aged and sick is something far less than an ideal existence. None who have ever been involved in providing such care would suggest that it is always easily done. But whatever else may be said on the subject does not displace the duty that children have toward parents, and it should be considered a privilege to care for those who once cared for you. One of life's tragedies is to witness a neglected and ignored father or mother whose life is almost spent, whose children seem to lack even natural affection one would expect. So many children, although adults, are so concerned for only their own ways, their own ambitions and their own selfishness that they neglect parents.

### **Continuing After Death**

Honoring parents need not end with death, but only with the death of the child. Holding parents in honor in precious memory is to continue to honor father and mother. How sweet and reassuring, comforting and strengthening it is to recall the days of youth when the hands of father and mother were tending to our needs and guiding our hearts, showing us by word and deed the way we should go. When parents have crossed Jordan, those who have been so blessed to have had godly parents will come to appreciate more and more what benefits they received from their parents.

### **Errors Regarding Parents**

There are some things that ought not be done that some confuse as giving honor to parents. In some societies there is a strong ancestor worship. Only God is to be worshipped. Civilizations that have engaged in ancestor worship have distorted their relationship to their parents and to God. Placing the will of parents before the will of God is to again get priorities confused. There are some who may never become Christians, children of God, because their parents were not Christians. Some hold the church back in its mission because their parents used to do things differently. To be sure, when our parents followed the truth, and we follow the truth, we walk the same paths, but only because we both are following God. But with the

changing of situation and conditions that are inevitable along the way of life, there may be various means of doing the same work that God wants done. We should not be so wedded to such things as once devised by our foreparents that we do not utilize more efficient and productive means of accomplishing the goal. This would be an improper attitude toward parents. At the same time, tried and proven means and methods should not be cast away hurriedly simply for the sake of doing things differently. We dare not fall into the deceptive manner that things new are always best. To have the attitude that some display to always do things differently may reflect we are more concerned with what is new than with what is true.

Neither does this fifth commandment include the adoration of self-appointed ecclesiastical leaders who call themselves "father" and claim a spiritual parenthood over others. Jesus said, Matthew 23:9, *"Call no man you father on the earth, for one is your Father, even he who is in heaven."* This does not forbid calling our male parent by the term "father" because the Holy Spirit uses the term in that sense many times in Scripture. This does forbid using the term with reference to a spiritual title or distinction, looking to such as one elevated in rank as if he was the go-between of God and man. Romanism, as well as other religions, has grossly violated this teaching of Christ through the years. The practice is wrong and should be discontinued.

### **The Best Way**

What is the true way to honor parents? To live a godly and decent life before all men as God's child is a crown of everlasting glory to fathers and mothers. The greatest honor a child can bestow upon his parents is to live a consecrated and faithful Christian life. This builds for the parents a monument that shall endure after the passing away of stone.

True honor begins with genuine love for parents. It is manifested even in "little things," like keeping in contact with them, showing interest in their lives, as well as doing those things for them that need to be done. Letters, calls, gifts, remembrances, words, visits, honor of their views and respect for their advice are such things that parents may lawfully claim and expect from their children. Speaking respectfully of them, refraining from abusing them, being conscious of their feelings, trying to make their days bright as possible, all are ways and means of showing the honor to parents which they deserve.

Even when one is married and the first loyalty is to his or her mate, there is no cause to dishonor one's parents.

Honoring parents brings blessings to the child as well as the parent. Virtue has its own reward. The serenity of conscience is likened unto the peace that passeth understanding. One who honors his or her parents will most likely rear children who in turn will honor them. The Jews were promised a long existence in Canaan if they honored their parents. Their dishonor of them and loss of respect for parental and divine authority is what cost them their happiness and continued possession of the land.

## **Two Failures**

There are two types of failures in the parent-child relationship. One is the slackened discipline of children to the point of abandonment. Parental authority has been weakened by poisonous philosophies which say, "Let the child express himself, without discipline, lest you warp his personality." Time has already proven that the most warped personality walking among men is that person who has been spared discipline, never learning self-control, never having been properly taught the difference between right and wrong. Punishment for wrongs committed, restraint wisely and firmly applied, is a blessing to one and all who receive it. It is God's way of teaching respect and cannot and will not be surpassed or equaled by the devices of men, especially those created by those who care nothing for the spirit of mankind and the existence of God. Sparing proper discipline has produced an age of license, rape, arson, murder and similar inhumanities one toward the other in our nation which is a shame and disgrace before history and the world at large. Righteousness, restraint and respect for parental and other authorities are acquired traits, not something inherited. They must be taught. What failure has been the sorry lot of many lives on this score!

A second type of failure is the domineering, autocratic, dictatorial parent who fails to properly consider the personal dignity and worth of the life and soul of the child. "*Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath*" has been violated by many, even well-meaning parents. Children are like coiled springs when they are born, pressed down at birth. But they must eventually be released. When they are so pressed during their formative years and not allowed to gradually uncoil under supervision, when the hour comes for them to be released they



will fly away in every direction. When the pressure is gradually lifted, however, being carefully managed, the spring will uncoil but stand where it should.

### **Protector of the Home**

The fifth commandment is the guardian of the home. Godless forces are running loose in the world and sowing the seeds of distrust, dishonor as well as defiance and disrespect. A prime order of business for the Christian is to stabilize the sanctity and honor of the laws of God concerning the home. Let the home be treasured, parents honored, disciplined learned, authority accepted and respected! Let intelligent youth join hands and hearts with concerned adults, and together they will be able to slay the dragons of evil that threaten everything that is good, pure and proper before God! Together, through Christ, an overwhelming victory will be won for all!

If the home and family are lost, society will degenerate to conditions heretofore believed impossible because of the extent of wickedness. May God grant that home, marriage, parent and child relationships be made to stand in the strength of the Lord!

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“change” are often guilty of seeking change for the sake of change. Let them show from Scripture what should be changed. While they ridicule and deride the plea and those who make it as being “traditional,” we insist that it is Biblical and that which they wish to use to displace it is nothing other than false doctrines and human traditions in its early stages.

For a moment, let us suppose that the world would give heed to our plea. What would be the result? Immediately, there would cease to be the divided and chaotic state of denominationalism because nothing in Scripture authorizes the existence of any denomination, past, present or future. Atheism could be put to flight because believers would take the sword of the Spirit and begin to wage an effective warfare against it rather than against others who believe God exists. The false doctrines from the manuals, human creeds, disciplines, catechisms, confessionals, conferences, councils, feelings, summits and subjective attitudes would be abandoned for the lack of Biblical authorization. People could concentrate on being devoted to improving their

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# **Sixth Commandment**

On the surface the commandment, "*Thou shalt not kill*" may seem easily understood. It is short and to the point and appears there may be not too much to consider. But there is more involved than first might meet the eye because the commandment introduces and suggests many related matters.

There are hints and insinuations involved in this teaching that raise some of the most profound teaching of the Bible. Therefore, we must approach this study with caution, being careful to consider all the counsel of God and not focus our attention too narrowly lest we omit what God includes or become guilty of adding what He has not included.

What did the commandment mean to the Israelite people to whom it was originally given? Genesis 9:5,6, "*And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made he man.*" Because man is distinctive, being created in the image of God, being spirit as well as flesh (Genesis 1:26,27), God prohibited man taking another's life. Punishment for disrespect of life was to forfeit one's own right to life.

Go back even earlier in the history of the human family and observe God's displeasure toward Cain because he killed his brother Abel. So the sixth commandment is a restatement of a truth that has existed from the beginning.

## **Murder**

The word translated in our English language "*kill*" literally means murder. All killing is not murder. Lives are sometimes lost accidentally. We have noted that taking life as punishment was not forbidden. Even life taken in warfare is not under consideration here because the same God that gave the sixth commandment often commanded Israel to wage war. Obviously both God and Israel understood these distinctions. They also realized that it did not refer to taking animal life because animal sacrifices were commanded of them in worship to God. What is prohibited in the sixth commandment is murder; the intentional, deliberate destruction of innocent human life or taking into one's

own hands, as it were, the right and power of avenging that does not belong to the individual. There was a lawful manner and reason for taking a life but there was the unlawful taking of life also.

Romans 12:17-21 teaches the Christian a different attitude and action toward enemies than personal vengeance. A practice of what we call the Golden Rule would forever banish murder from society. This commandment, included also in the doctrine of Christ, forbade taking personal vengeance and committing murder. Let us consider some related matters.

### **Civil Power**

Under the new covenant of Christ Paul teaches the right of civil power to wield the sword, an instrument of death, in its service to God as a minister of God, ordained of God, as the civil power does the work that God has appointed of government (Romans 13:1-7). Sometimes people make the grave mistake of confusing what God taught is the work of the church and the work of government. They also confuse the means and methods God allows in the conduct of the church and government. The spiritual warfare of the church does not resort to carnal warfare and physical action. But the work of government not only allows it but calls for it with God's direction and approval. It is gross error to contend that the civil power must be governed and regulated by the rules and directions God has given for the conduct of the spiritual kingdom. Even Jesus recognized this distinction when He was taken by His enemies, but He said His kingdom was not of this world and if it had been then would His servants fight (John 18:36). By this our Lord shows there is a difference between the operation of the spiritual kingdom and the conduct of the civil power.

The issue of the role of civil government is not our primary theme, however, but is only one of those related matters that is suggested in consideration of the sixth commandment.

### **Mercy Killing**

In our time there is much talk about what is called mercy killing, the taking of life from those who are terminally ill, possibly infirmed beyond any hope of recovery, maybe even advanced in years, suffering and with the desire to pass from this life. Are we given the right to take the life of those who are so

infirm? This commandment certainly relates to this question.

We must ever remember the sanctity and sacredness of human life due to the fact that we are created in the image of God. Suffering provokes sympathy within the breast of every sensitive human being. To witness those near and dear to us in situations of hopelessness provokes the deepest emotions within us. But we cannot allow our emotions to overrule the teaching of God. Willful, deliberate, intentional destruction of innocent human life is murder. While it is difficult for us to bear, and often difficult to understand why certain conditions prevail, we have no authority to dismiss God's teaching to accommodate our feelings. We are of the strong conviction that such provocation of death violates this very divine sentiment, "*Thou shalt not kill.*"

### **Warfare**

Due to the limitation of this discussion we do not intend to extensively discuss the matter of taking life in times of warfare. Realizing this is a highly controversial matter, it will suffice in this study to simply contend that the sixth commandment does not address that subject because all killing, even in such conditions as warfare, punishment or self-defense, are not murder in the sight of God. The same God that gave this commandment permitted each of these things. The role of a Christian in government is another highly controversial matter, but we would contend that the government is an ordained minister of God for the performance of that which is good. It is very inconsistent to suggest that children of the devil are the only ones who can have fellowship with God in doing what God calls good while His own children are prohibited from it. Again, we must be reminded that the conduct of civil affairs and the conduct of the spiritual kingdom are not regulated by the same regulations from God. Each serves a function and the functions are not identical anymore than the function of the home and the church are identical, although overlapping at times. Even the home and the church operate under different rules. Parents may well resort to spanking children in their upbringing. But certainly the church never has the right to engage in such discipline on its members. But Christians can consistently be involved in both home and church. So can Christians be involved in the proper performance of the affairs of the church and the affairs of civil government.

## **"Don't Convert Too Many"**

We would like to suggest that each one do some serious consideration of the matter of a Christian as an officer of civil government or as a soldier by thinking of something once presented to me by one of my children even when he was somewhat young, but his reasoning was more profound than one might think. He asked me if only non-Christians could attend to the affairs of government (as some teach), especially as the enforcement of the law, protection of our liberties, preservation from wicked invaders, even self-defense. When I suggested, as I then thought, that Christians should never be involved in such matters and that God would provide so the Christian would never have to be involved, he remarked, "Then we better not convert too many because there would not be enough left in the world to provide the protection and execute punishment against the wicked." I thought about that and suggest you think about it also. Does not even this necessitate the propriety of God's people being involved in matters that God has ordained? I am of the conviction that it does permit such activity. All will not agree with me, but I consider them to be as wrong as I once was.

In Matthew twelve, when Jesus was accused of casting out devils in the name of the devil, He commented, "*How can one enter into the house of the strong man, and spoil his goods except he first bind the strong man?*" The implication is that the strong man could rightfully protect himself and his properties against the injuries and harm an intruder might bring against him. We have the God-given duty to provide for those who are in our care and custody, including our families. Does this provision mean only the supply of food, shelter and clothing? Does it not also mean their spiritual provisions? Would it not also embrace their protection from evil doers? We are convinced that it does. Self-defense and defense of others is the motive here. The taking of a life in that process is neither the motive nor the goal. Inadvertently the loss of life may occur. But murder is not what is committed and murder is what the sixth commandment forbids.

## **Not to Hate**

Jesus carried the commandment even further than did the Law of Moses. Matthew 5:21,22, He spoke against hatred, the

motive behind murder, as being a sin as much as the actual murder. Hatred against others is not tolerated by our Lord. We should show love even toward enemies. We should never deliberately seek their harm. While we consider our love for our enemies, we must also consider love that we must have for those of our care that our enemies might seek to destroy or harm. Surely, love for family and brethren, even self, takes priority over love for those who seek destruction. That there are priorities involved in loving is not a debatable matter. All will consider that proper and expected.

*"Thou shalt not kill"* is not as broad as many believe. All killing is not forbidden. Murder, born of hatred and intent to harm, is forbidden and totally incompatible with the will of God. Such it was for physical Israel and such it remains for spiritual Israel, the people of God, the Lord's church, Christians.

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## ***Seventh Commandment***

The study of the Ten Commandments is no easy task. While we might concentrate on one commandment by itself and that not be too complicated, the Ten Commandments are rather broad and sweeping principles that introduce many other related subjects that can become rather involved and therefore demanding of more study. Such is the case with the commandment now under consideration.

Exodus 20:14, *"Thou shalt not commit adultery."* This commandment not only takes us into the realm of sexual activity, but also into marriage, divorce, remarriage, the sanctity of the marriage bed, obligations and responsibilities as well as privileges and limitations in marriage. The teaching of God has meaning on all these themes and we must learn what God has taught. We do well to approach such subjects with an open mind because we are often too easily pressured to allow current conditions, trends, emotional feelings and personal involvements to cloud our ability to see what is actually revealed. It is wrong to ignore laws that God has announced, but equally wrong to make laws that God has not made. This is a fault often involved

in a study of sexual morality. We are wise to be dogmatic only insofar as the Scripture teaches.

### **Many Views**

We must be aware that there are many varying views held by people regarding adultery, marriage, divorce, remarriage and kindred themes. The variety does not mean that we cannot know what is right and wrong, but it does underscore for us that it demands more of us to determine right and wrong. Because there are many views we must be assured that the positions we take are the positions Scripture teaches and not be carried to and fro by what others may or may not think. While we would not attribute to any one person to have the knowledge of all questions that may be raised, we would insist that the resolution of all difficulties in these matters is existent in Scripture.

What was forbidden to the Jews in this command in Exodus 20? Many Jews took a very narrow meaning for adultery as simply the taking of another man's wife. But this covers only a small portion of the morality involved. Such a definition does not identify the guilt of sexual intercourse in the event neither participant is married to anybody. We cannot conclude that sexual intercourse outside of marriage, if it does not involve married people, is acceptable to God. There are other laws of God that forbid such immorality. But as for the Jews, this commandment, strictly speaking, was the sin of sexual intercourse between a man and another man's wife. The man was defined as an adulterer and the woman as an adulteress. There were other teachings that condemned fornication, defined as whoredom.

### **Interchanging Terms**

In the New Testament the terms adultery and fornication are often used interchangeably. Webster's Dictionary defines adultery as violation of the marriage bed, having to do primarily with illicit sexual intercourse of married persons but not married to each other. Fornication is considered a much broader term even in Webster's Dictionary that would include not only adultery as previously defined but also all other perverted and illicit sexual intercourse, such as relationships outside of marriage, homosexuality, lesbianism, incest, bestiality and such like. Often the terms do appear together in various listings of sins

and for good reason since the Jews had formerly held the terms with some considerable distinction.

However, in the language of the New Testament the terms are so often used interchangeably, both referring to sexual intercourse between persons who are not married to each other. We must recognize these meanings and conform our conclusions accordingly.

### **Former Times**

This commandment, which is also repeated and enlarged in the new covenant of Christ, raises the question about men of God of former dispensations that had more than one wife. Were they guilty of the very thing God here forbids? It is evident that God's original intent in marriage was for one man and one woman to remain one flesh for one lifetime. I know of no circumstance or teaching that suggests God ever changed that intent. In fact, this is what Jesus plainly restates when discussing the subject of marriage, divorce and remarriage in Matthew nineteen. So we have no misgivings as to God's intent regardless of what some men of former ages may or may not have done. We know that the will of God today is under the authority of Christ and one man, one woman, remaining one flesh for one lifetime is the rule of God.

That some of former ages had many wives is certain. Lamech was the first of whom we read having more than one wife. But so did Abraham, Jacob, David, Solomon, and others. Solomon was condemned for allowing his many wives to take him into idolatry but there is no specific condemnation of him for having many wives. This is not to say that this was approved by God, however. David bore sons by six or eight different women. The twelve patriarchs came from four women, but the father of them all was the one man named Jacob.

According to the definition of adultery and this seventh commandment, these men were guilty of the very sin forbidden. We have to note that this commandment was given after the lives of those we have mentioned who lived in the Patriarchal Age, but David and Solomon surely lived subject to it. David was rebuked for his illicit relationship with Bathsheba but was never rebuked, as far as the record shows, for having already had several women to wife.

I do not profess to know why this was allowed. I do know that God has at times allowed that which He does not approve,



and I do know what He approves, indeed, what He allows and disallows under Christ because that will is spelled out concisely and precisely for us. I also know that Jesus taught it was because of the hardness of heart that it was done, but *“from the beginning it was not so.”* The rule for us is clear.

### **Our Standard**

We can also be assured that the conduct of those of the past dispensations is not the standard for us today. Whatever they did, whether with allowance or even approval (and we do not read of God's approval of such arrangements), we are under a different system and the perfect will of Christ that enjoins God's original intent in marriage. Those of former ages did not abide with God's intent, but Christ has restored that concept without doubt as ascertained by His own words.

Jesus said that fornication was reason to allow divorce (Matthew 5:27-32; 19:3;9). He did not command divorce, but He allows it if for the cause of fornication. There is always the course of forgiveness. Fornication means illicit sexual intercourse, which means intercourse between those not married to each other.

Some Jews had different views regarding the matter of divorce. Deuteronomy 24:1 was interpreted and misinterpreted. The cause for giving a divorcement bill was *“uncleanness in her.”* Some contended this meant an illicit sexual relationship while others said it could include anything about the woman that the man did not particularly like and therefore allowed divorce for any cause. Jesus' teaching gave credence to the first position rather than the second.

Under Moses various grounds had been allowed, but that is not the case under Christ. Moses never approved of divorce nor commanded a divorce, but in the event of divorce he commanded a writing of divorcement, a legally ascertained severance of marriage before society. But again, we remind ourselves, *“but from the beginning”* is our standard.

### **Duration of Marriage**

The inescapable conclusion from the teaching of Jesus is that marriage is for the lifetime of the parties involved. If one dies, the other is free to remarry if he or she chooses (Romans 7). There is one exception to this law of lifetime duration of

marriage. Fornication allows the non-fornicator to divorce the fornicator and the non-fornicator can remarry without guilt of adultery, but the one who is the fornicator and the one the fornicator may then marry both enter into a spiritual and physical state of adultery and will remain therein so long as they remain in that relationship. From this conclusion there is no Biblical refutation.

Salvation is dependent upon repentance and repentance will not allow one to continue in sin. This does not mean there must always be complete restitution because this is not always possible. But those guilty of lying cannot continue lying; those guilty of stealing must cease stealing; and those in adultery must come out of the adulterous relationship. Many have allowed the multi-married people of their association, even within their families, to color their thinking and compromise this teaching. Many have allowed the strongly emotional appeal of the existence of children born of an adulterous union to cause them to set aside God's law regarding who has the right of marriage. This is why we earlier gave words of caution that we seek what Scripture teaches and not allow ourselves to be misled by such irrelevant matters.

### **The Adultery Considered**

The adultery under consideration is not spiritual adultery but physical. The context makes this clear. Jesus sent forth His strong teaching demanding moral purity and defending God's original intent regarding home, marriage, fidelity, morality and the sanctity of the marriage bed. Transgression of these sacred vows that demand keeping one only to his or her marriage partner are not to be condoned. In our society this is one of the more obvious and blatant violations of the will of Christ.

One need not reflect very long to understand the reasoning of God behind such teaching. Unless the conclusions we have mentioned are true there is no protection for the sanctity of the home and marriage. Defilement of the home by divorce and the attending consequences make havoc of the stability of society and the welfare of everyone involved. Nations have sown seeds of their own destruction when the home and family were allowed to crumble. This reality of history should arouse us to urgent concern for our own land that presently has the highest divorce rate of any nation of the world.

## **So Important**

We must impress God's laws on this subject upon the minds of our young, not only for the sake of their homes of the future, their marriages, their morality, but their salvation and faithfulness to God. To prevent the problems of divorce is more easily accomplished than the solution because the solutions often are shattering. The way to prevent the tragedy of divorce, adultery, fornication and the many related defilements, is to teach respect for the law of God and obedience to the principles of this seventh commandment. It stands as a guardian of marriage and the home.

God's grace never allows or grants license to sin or to continue in sin. Marriage is for "keeps." Any other approach to it is to invite disaster to life and eternity. Let us teach this seventh commandment and urge moral purity, entrance into marriage without the stains and scars of sexual transgression, and teach the sanctity of this holy relationship by demanding there be no violation of the commandment.

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## ***Decide for Christ***

This is a plea for those souls that are not yet in Christ. We are persuaded that it is logical and reasonable to decide to be a Christian. When God made man He made him a free moral agent, capable of making choices and decisions. Alongside this power is the necessity of making correct decisions. Making decisions is a very personal and individual matter. There are many things that we must decide and must decide for ourselves one by one. This attribute of mankind can be his glory or it can be his undoing depending upon the decisions he makes.

All who travel life's highway know that there are times when we are at the crossroads, so to speak, and must decide which direction our lives will take. We reach the forks of the road. Many decisions in life are relatively trivial and insignificant. If we make the wrong choice in such matters it can be easily rectified and no real harm is done. Other decisions are far more important because they affect not only the present but the future, even

eternity. Some decisions, if made incorrectly, cannot be so easily corrected, if at all. We can spend a lifetime reaping results of wrong decisions. Decisions that have a deep, lasting, even eternal effect must be carefully and intelligently made.

### **Most Important Decision**

There is no decision more important than the one we make regarding Jesus Christ, whether we realize it or not. Our decision affects every area of our existence. What will you do with Jesus? On this decision hinges your path in this life, your moral guide, your ambitions, your manner of living, your influence on others, your associates, and your eternal destiny.

This is a decision that cannot be evaded nor avoided. It is a matter that must be resolved one way or the other. Many decisions can be postponed without any effect that is too serious. But postponement in the matter of Christ is equal to rejection of Him. Christianity allows for no middle ground. Attempts at neutrality are futile. We either decide FOR him or we decide AGAINST Him.

### **Calls for Decisions**

In the Old Testament, when Elijah came before Israel at Mount Carmel, Israel was wallowing in the state of indecision. First Kings 18:21, *"How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him."* Israel was lame, weak, condemned and rejected because they would not decide FOR God.

Years earlier Joshua had also confronted the people. Joshua 24:14,15, *"Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt, and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*

Moses called to Israel to make decisions. Deuteronomy 30:19, *"I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live."* Only the right decision would preserve the people.

Matthew 6:24, *"No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."* Matthew 12:30, *"He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad."* We would insist that these passages and these words of Christ demand that we decide FOR Christ.

### **Refusal is Rebellion**

Once sufficient knowledge of Jesus Christ is known, refusal to obey is nothing less than rebellion against the authority of God. God does not expect or even want decisions based on ignorance. Before one can come to Christ certain knowledge is necessary. One must know that God exists, that Christ is God's Son, that he is lost in sin, that he cannot save himself, that Christ is the only Savior, and that he must come to Christ His way in order to be saved or otherwise remain lost and damned. That way demands faith in Christ, repentance of sins, confession of Christ, and baptism into Christ for the remission of sins.

God, through Paul, declares, *"Now is the day of salvation."* Once a person has this knowledge, to refuse to submit to the will of God is to bring upon oneself his own condemnation because he remains in his sins. Every moment one remains out of Christ he remains in the spiritual kingdom of Satan. There are only two spiritual kingdoms, God's and Satan's. Those in God's kingdom have left the darkness of sin and entered into the kingdom of light (Colossians 1:13).

### **Be Reasonable**

God only expects us to be reasonable. It is only logical and reasonable and sensible for a person to surrender his will and life to the Son of God. After all, we owe our very existence to God. Is it not reasonable to serve our Creator? The creature is expected to worship the Creator. We know that life is brief and we shall someday die, then stand before God in judgment (Hebrews 9:27). Is it not reasonable to be prepared to meet God? The only way to make preparation is to come to Christ (Acts 4:12), since He is the only way of salvation.

What if there was no hereafter? What has a person lost by coming to Christ in that event? He would have lived his life the best possible way by imitating Christ. But since we can know

there is life after this one, what has one lost if he does not come to Christ? He has lost everything. Coming to Christ and deciding for Him is a matter where we have everything to gain and nothing to lose. To refuse to decide for Him we have everything to lose and nothing to gain.

### **Futile**

Indecision is an attempt at futility and is dangerous at best. Every time, every day you do not decide FOR Him you give Satan additional opportunities to captivate your soul forever. Every time the appeal of love of the Lord strikes your heart and fails to penetrate only makes it hardened and easier to continue to refuse Him. This can happen until even the truth and love of God will have no influence on you. Every delay is a vicious gamble of your soul and eternity. Only Satan tells you that you have plenty of time to come to Christ. In a brief moment, your time, your life, your opportunity for salvation can be snatched from you forever. Like in the days of Noah, God's Spirit will not always strive with you and He now does call you through the gospel message. You could yield to the Lord's Son and no longer risk your soul.

### **Involves So Much**

We also suggest another reason you should decide FOR Christ. There is just too much involved for your indecision to be justified. This is not of the trivial decision of life. It involves your present life and how you shall live it. It involves your influence even upon those closest to you. It involves your talents and abilities and how they shall be put to use. It involves the destiny of your soul.

Fathers and mothers are usually held in such high esteem by their children. Yet, many parents are influencing their young to follow them into the jaws of an open hell. On the other hand, parents could be creating a favorable atmosphere and lending encouragement to their precious young to live their lives righteously and in service to God that leads to a heavenly home. It is worth considering becoming a Christian because of the impact it could make on those around you.

Matthew 7:21-27 describes two men who built houses; one on the sand and the other on the rock. The one built on sand was by the foolish man who heard the Word but did not heed it.

The wise man built his house upon the rock and he is like the one who heard and heeded the Word of God. Which of the two characterizes you? We plead tenderly and urgently, decide FOR Christ.

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## ***Have We Outgrown Our Plea?***

Two questions are raised by this subject. What is our plea? Has it become outmoded, outdated or too limited? In other words, has the brotherhood “matured” to the point where a new plea should take the place of the one we have been making? There are those who so contend.

A general definition of our plea to the world is for the restoration of New Testament Christianity in every generation, restoring all things essential and required in the faith of which Christ is the author. The plea is not of recent origin nor peculiar to our homeland. The very plea itself implies there has been an apostasy, a falling away from the faith revealed in Scripture. Otherwise, there would be no need for restoration.

Ulrich Zwingli, in the sixteenth century, was an early reformer and attempted a restoration. Others have risen from time to time either calling for reformation of existing religious bodies or a restoration and return to primitive Christianity. Down through the ages since the apostasy that was predicted by the apostles men have raised similar pleas.

The efforts have not made significant impacts on the religious scene, however, until the restoration efforts in this country in the 1800's. To be sure, the Reformation Movement, that gave birth to Protestantism, was of tremendous significance to the religious conditions in the world. But “reformation” falls short of the “restoration” that calls for a genuine return to Christianity as revealed in Scripture.

### **Early Efforts**

Beginning among Presbyterian clergymen, men began to

visualize the church of the Lord as found in the Bible. Grieving over the division, confusion and strife among religionists who claimed to be Christians, and seeing professed disciples of Christ promoting conflicting doctrines and practices, tearing at each other in competition, they began searching the Scriptures and calling for all people to be united on the basis of Biblical teaching. The standard was to be no more and no less than *"thus saith the Lord."* Breaking away from the various sectarian bodies then in existence, taking God at His Word, and taking only God's Word, the movement began to grow and churches patterned after the New Testament teaching were the result. This remains the plea that we have today. How this plea could be wrong is impossible to see, if one respects the Bible.

There are those matters which we strongly believe because the Bible teaches them. We have no human creed (a creed is simply what is believed). Our creed is Christ. Everything we say and practice, teach and endorse, is to be in harmony with His will. It must be according to the Lord's authority. That which is either more or less than Scripture cannot be accepted. Truth will at times create division between those who are willing to follow God's Word and those who are unwilling to do so. Many religious bodies have the same problem as the man who testified in court. When asked by the judge if he told the whole truth, the man responded, "Yes, your honor, and a whole lot more besides." This is what has caused problems in religion. Too many are not content with the all-sufficient Scripture but have added a whole lot more besides.

### **Authority**

Not only does our plea call for the Bible as the standard, the New Testament in particular, even as Scripture itself requires, but the plea is for the return to authorized religious practices. It is right to call Bible things by Bible names and do Bible things Bible ways. We should speak as the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11). It is right, for example, to practice baptism for the remission of sins. It is right to insist that baptism be immersion. It is right to teach and practice the observance of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week. It is right that Christians conform in daily living to the doctrine of Christ. It is right to deplore division and exhort for unity based upon revealed truth. Doctrinal purity in teaching and scriptural practice go hand in hand. Both are essential. Without this there can be no restoration of New



Testament Christianity.

But have we outgrown that plea? Is it no longer a valid movement? Should we move from it to a broader base and wider appeal? Have we become so sophisticated, intelligent, tolerant, educated and sufficiently mature to change our plea and be more accomodating toward those who take a different religious position? Some are clamoring for such a change.

### **Some Things to Consider**

Have we outgrown the plea that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, the only Savior of mankind? Multitudes are being taught that this is too narrow because it does not allow for the salvation of those who would choose another lord. Even clergymen in denominational bodies have denied that one must be a Christian to be saved. Shall we adopt their stance?

Have we outgrown the Lord's doctrine in morals, marriage, ethics, purity of life? Much of the world has never accepted the way of Christ, finding it too confining and limiting of their "self-expression" and so called freedom. It seems that we hear more and more, even among those in the church, offering laxity toward drunkenness, adultery, dishonesty, lasciviousness, greed and immodesty. The modern dance, alcoholic beverages, filthy entertainment are too often found among professed church members. Unfair dealing, lying, gluttony, lust, covetousness of material gain and an emphasis on the physical rather than the spiritual is a large part of the lives of most people of the world, and even many who call themselves followers of Christ. Can one can rightly be called a follower of Christ and ignore what He said and did and live contrary to His will?

Have we outgrown the plea for real unity based on truth? Unity in diversity is the craze of some minds. While atheism advances rapidly, efforts toward some kind of so-called unity have been spawned, but on the basis that "you go your way, I go mine; I'm O.K. and you're O.K.; everything is beautiful in its own way; do your own thing." Some say all we must do is be honest and sincere and love. They neither understand unity nor love. Those clamoring for unity in diversity show no signs of desiring unity, but just union. Actually what they promote is fellowship in spite of division.

But is it not true that this unity in diversity philosophy is what has given rise to the division that genuine unity should cure? Too many seek agreement with each other to agree to disagree.

To agree to disagree is not unity but heresy. We cannot “get together” at the sacrifice of God’s truth. Peace at any price is the way some would have it. To ignore differences and only dwell on areas of agreement does not produce unity. It covers up division with a deception. Truth, however, is not negotiable and compromise of any point of truth ought never enter the mind of anyone who professed to follow Christ. Right cannot be sacrificed on the altar of so-called unity. Unity, not mere union, is our plea. As Paul urged in First Corinthians 1:10, we must not have division and the way to have unity is to speak the same things, be of the same mind and judgment, which demands following the same standard. Let us repeat! The only acceptable platform for unity is to stand firmly on God’s Word, doing what God teaches, without addition, subtraction, substitution, alteration or human innovation.

Have we outgrown the Biblical plea how to become a child of God? Some seem to think so because they no longer teach what the Bible does. Have we created a “better” plan of salvation? Do we have the right to begin teaching salvation by grace alone, or faith only, or praying through, or even baptism regardless of correct understanding of its significance? Is it too dogmatic to still preach faith repentance, confession and baptism like the Bible teaches? True, this excludes those of the denominational world from the blessing of salvation because they do not follow God’s plan. But who thinks he has the right to conclude that anybody can vary from God’s plan and then “claim” God’s blessings anyway?

### **Is It Really Maturity?**

Issue after issue and point after point can be raised and the same questions asked. Those listed are but examples. How can people outgrow truth and become “too mature and developed” to leave what Scripture teaches in order to expand and enlarge the fellowship? Our task of taking the gospel to the world is a gigantic one. But we shall not accomplish what God wants done by looking for short-cuts by altering His message. The plea that has been made is proper and sure because it is Biblical. It should be our determination to stick with it, not simply because those before us made the plea, but because we have the same convictions they had and hold these convictions for the same reason they did; namely, it is the Word of God. Those who seek

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individual lives into conformity with Scriptural requirements. It would truly be a time of "Onward Christian Soldiers!"

But we are realistic enough to realize that our plea will not likely be heard and heeded because it would require sacrificing too many "sacred cows." Manikind is very steeped in his own way in preference to the way of God. But whether anyone pays attention to the plea or not is not our major concern. We have the duty to make the plea, founded on the Bible, and to preach it, practice it, and persist in it regardless of what reactions come as a result, whether favorable or unfavorable.

Have we outgrown our plea? No, and it is impossible for us to do so. Some may abandon it and turn aside from it into religious error. But it cannot be improved because it is "*thus saith the Lord.*" Instead of thinking we have become too "spiritual and mature" and now need a new message, as some suggest, we should be busier at the task of proclaiming the truthful message we already have. This would terminate this new "unity in diversity" heresy. We should turn our spiritual weaponry against sin, denominational error, digression, modernism, atheism, and seek the salvation of those yet lost. If we were really maturing we would be more solidly supportive of the plea to restore New Testament Christianity than ever.

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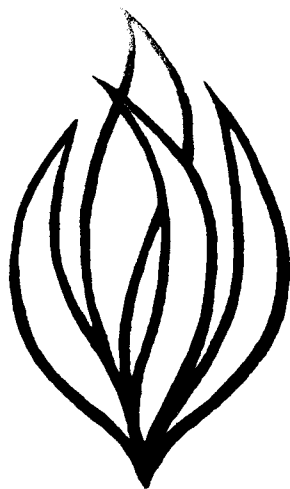
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# A Burning Fire



*"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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# ***Eighth Commandment***

Exodus 20:15, *"Thou shalt not steal."* Like most of the Ten Commandments, this one is also incorporated into the system of Christ even as it was a part of the Law of Moses.

This commandment gives recognition to the right of private ownership and provides safeguards of it. It is not surprising to find this safeguard of property alongside other solemn safeguards of life and morality because of the imposition of stewardship and responsibility. This commandment deals primarily with the handling of material things. Of course, things are not supposed to be of primary importance to the Christian anyway. But since they exist and must be used for the sustenance of life and each one has the responsibility to rightly use what comes into his possession, we are not surprised that God has provided certain protections toward properties that makes stewardship possible.

Historically, property rights have been grossly abused. Many attempts have been made to set them aside. Laws regulating property are often ignored and overrun. Experiments that abandon the right of private ownership have been tried only to end in miserable failure, even though they may have been invented with a motive for the common good. At this moment our world is embroiled in a worldwide conflict between systems that deny private ownership and systems that defend and encourage private ownership. But history has taught mankind, if only mankind would learn, that the abolition of private property and the rights thereto constitute the abolition of the virtues of industry, thrift, emotion, prudence, stewardship and personal dignity. The eighth commandment protects these virtues by protecting the rights of ownership that motivate and cultivate these virtues.

## **Not Communism**

It has been contended by some that the early Christians demonstrated true and perfect communism. Earl Browder, leading communist in the United States, once said that the communistic system he advocated and Christianity were connected and that he was simply trying to bring into reality, on a worldwide fashion, what existed among the early Christians. But this is not true. Christians enjoyed private ownership while

communism limits it and denied that right. The pooling together of their resources to assist the needy was a voluntary and temporary measure while communism confiscates property and places it all under state control. The early Christians distributed to each as they had need, but communism intends to give everybody the same and equal portion. So the two systems are not only not the same but contradictory.

Philip, Mark's mother, Barnabas, the centurion, all owned property. Annanias and Saphirra were punished, but not because they had property but because they lied about what they had given. Peter affirmed their right of distribution of their possessions. Rather than denying the right of private property, the faith of Christ encourages it, requiring those who have possessions to treat their possessions as a trust given to them by God and they are stewards that shall give an account of what they did with what came under their control.

### **Ownership Obligations**

Among the obligations that are inherent with ownership is that of being generous and charitable toward those who are without. Ownership is not only a privilege, but in one sense, a duty. Let me show why we contend it is a duty to seek ownership.

As Christians we are morally obligated to help those who are in need (Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 4:28; First John 3:17). Can one shirk this responsibility by deliberately keeping himself poor and without means to help? Poverty may not always be avoided. But deliberate poverty can be avoided through work. The deliberate and wilful avoidance of accumulation of possessions and seeking poverty is to shirk duty. You throw a burden on those around you to provide for your needs. You make it impossible for you to be of benefit and assistance to others who are in need. We are to labor to provide for ourselves and those of our own, not only that we may live but have to give to those who suffer misfortune and have need.

Many people of God in the Old Testament were people with great possessions, such as Abram, Job and others. Many strong Christians through the ages and even today are people who have great material wealth at their disposal because they have been profitable servants, good managers of that which came into their care, and they have gained and increased, some in manifold abundance. Many buildings stand today in which brethren meet for worship because good Christians had



accumulated an economic surplus and made the acquisition of the building possible. Schools, missionary efforts, religious journals, orphan homes and many other good works are done because some have used their talents and earned, even a large surplus and abundance but who have used what they earned to provide for such things. It is a false and vicious accusation to contend that all who are wealthy have gained their wealth in a crooked and underhanded fashion. While doubtless many have done this, many have not.

### **Possessed by Possessions**

We must give a word of caution at this point. It is a talent in itself to be able to rightly use great wealth and not let it possess the possessor. Some who have received large sums have allowed it to control their lives and it ruined them and damned their souls. Some who have never had much have also failed to show ability to properly use even the little they have. But because some misuse what is placed into their trust does not mean material ownership is evil. It is the "*love of money*," not money itself, that is at the root of all evil. One's attitude toward what he has is what counts whether he is rich or poor or in-between. His attitude will determine what he will do to acquire wealth and how he will use it once he has acquired it.

We err to think it is impossible for the rich to go to heaven. He assuredly cannot please God if his riches come first with him before God. This, sadly, is too often the case. The reason this is such a danger to the rich is because they might be inclined to put their trust in their riches, and in their own abilities to get gain, and forget God. But if a person has the talent, ability and opportunity to earn, and then uses what he earns to the glory of God, realizing he is responsible before God for talent, ability, opportunity and the use of wealth, then that person can be the means of blessings for multitudes.

### **Acquiring Material Things**

The eighth commandment protects not only the right of ownership but also governs the means of acquiring ownership and possessions. A person may have wealth because of his labors, through purchases and investments, by inheritance, or even from receiving gifts. All of these are honorable means of gaining possessions. But all devious methods of acquisition are

forbidden to a follower of God. Gambling is wrong because it is an attempt to circumvent God's approved ways of having. It is the effort to gain something for nothing. It results from the lust for possessions without the toil. Its presence has demonstrated repeatedly that it discourages work, thrift, industry and even morality.

This commandment deals primarily with the acquisition of wealth by means and methods that violate the rights of others. Theft, fraud, dishonest transactions, larceny, cheating, swindling, embezzlement, misappropriation of funds, violations of trust, excessive charges, misrepresentative tax payments, shoplifting, non-payment of debts, padded expense accounts are all examples of taking what does not belong to the taker. Our courts and laws usually make distinctions in these matters based upon the varying definitions given to crimes, the amounts taken, extenuating circumstances and other matters. But such distinctions do not abide in the Word of God. Regardless of the procedure used or the amount involved, such things are violations of the rights of ownership and they constitute a violation of the command, *"Thou shalt not steal."* To contend otherwise would be to contend against the Word of God and commit the worst theft of all, stealing from God's Word. Jeremiah 23:30, *"I am against the prophets, the Lord said, that steal my words every one from his neighbor."*

### **Robbing God**

Our world is suffering from wholesale theft of the Word of God. Truth is being withheld from people who have the right to hear it. Truth was withheld during the Dark Ages with opposition to translating the Bible into the tongues of common men. It is withheld by many parents from their children by their neglect to see that children are properly taught the will of God.

Widespread theft of truth is apparent in many lands where the proclamation of the gospel is outlawed, even the distribution of the Word through print being prohibited. For the sake of being and remaining popular and accepted by the world there be many who are even supposed to be proclaimers of truth who withhold truth that needs to be heard. There are preachers who may not teach overt error in their sermons but who are not faithful to God enough to preach what needs to be heard, saying only what he thinks his hearers want to hear. He thereby protects himself, his position, his salary, his standing and

acceptance by others. Is it not a fearful thing to steal God's Word from others regardless of the way the theft is committed?

Another terrible theft is stealing from God. Malachi 3:8,9, *"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse; for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation."* Notice the question, *"Will a man rob God?"* The answer is, "Yes." How can men rob God? They do so by keeping out of God's treasury that which ought to be in it. Achan robbed God when he took the spoils of Jericho and hid them in his tent because the spoils belonged to the Lord's treasury. Since people of old could and did rob God by withholding from God's treasury what ought to have been placed there, why cannot people today also be justly accused of robbing God when they do the same thing? Not only can men rob God of funds, but also of time, energy and devotion that God and His cause are due.

### **Christ's Answer**

The faith of Christ provides the antidote to stealing. Christianity is the cure that destroys greed, selfishness, materialism and the motives that prompt people to acquire possessions wrongfully and use them wrongfully. Christianity upholds the virtues of work, thrift, prudence, diligence, industry, stewardship, giving and helping others. It teaches us what is the right relationship between ourselves and the material things of this life. All things are God's and we are but loaned a few of them for a short while and in time we shall turn everything to someone else and then give an account of how we got them and what we did with them as well as our attitude toward them.

The faith of Christ appeals to the heart of man to be compassionate, considerate and respectful of others and what they have just as he would want others to so regard him and what he has. He cultivates no love for any material thing that would lead him to take or get it wrongfully. He will not deprive another of what belongs to them. He will not steal. This is what this commandment forbids.

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# ***Ninth and Tenth Commandments***

This is the final lesson on the Ten Commandments and in it we shall consider the last two. We have seen that each commandment guards something that needs protection from defilement of any kind. They protect the authority and power of Deity. The second protects man from false worship of images. The third protects the sacredness of God's name. The fourth protects the virtue of work and the privilege of rest. The fifth protects parental authority and respect of parents. The sixth guards the sanctity of human life as the seventh protects the sanctity of the home. The eighth protects property rights. The ninth guards against deliberate deception and protects one's right to a good reputation against false words.

The Pharisees considered this command only to apply to court procedures. Exodus 20:16, *"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."* While court procedure would be included, it certainly would not be limited to that. Jesus expanded this principle in His covenant to embrace the whole area of human speech and communication. Under the old law they were not to swear to a lie. Under Christ *"every idle word that men shall speak they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."*

The echo of this commandment vibrates throughout the New Testament. Inspired writers condemned backbiting, whispering against others. James 4:11, *"Speak not one against another, brethren."* The Colossians were warned not to lie to one another. Among those cast out of the celestial city included *"every one that loveth and maketh a lie"* (Revelation 22:15).

## **A Sin Against All**

Bearing false witness is a crime against God and man. Civilized nations rank false testimony as committing a great crime. Perjury in courts is a felony and punishable by imprisonment. In our day we have seen many people perjure themselves, be indicted and sent to prison. But for every offense of perjury there must be a million equally sinful infractions of the ninth commandment. There are so many ways it can be

transgressed.

It is violated by slander, half-truths, intentional deception, evil insinuation, false claims, misleading promises, fraudulent advertising, deliberate misquotations and ever so many similar things. These actions violate both the letter and spirit of the ninth commandment.

Socrates once said, "The flatterer is the most vicious among tamed beasts; and slander the worst among wild beasts." But what a glorious company have endured the wrath of the undisciplined hordes through the ages who have shown no respect for telling the truth. There was Joseph who was slandered and against whom lies were told. Naboth was killed on the basis of false testimony. Stephen, Paul, Silas and others bore the reproach of false accusers. None have suffered more from lies than did our Lord of glory as He was accused of gluttony, drunkenness, blasphemy, treason and outright lying. His disciples have been accused of falsely stealing His body from His grave. Countless times has false testimony been brought against good people and against truth.

### **Abuse of Freedom**

Some have even tried to contend that prohibiting the "privilege" of lying is a violation of freedom of speech. Freedom of speech does not include the right to lie. Lying is not an accepted privilege but a sin. Whether one speaks orally and audibly or puts the lie on paper, he is guilty of sin because he has the obligation to tell the truth. Freedom of the press does not include the right to lie and misrepresent but sadly many who publish papers, secular and religious, have never learned that fact of righteousness. Many people in public life suffer because of false witnesses. Certainly gospel preachers have been victimized by servants of the devil, both in and out of the church, by the vile lies that enemies of truth will pour out against them. Why is it that many do not seem to realize the value of truth above lies?

### **The Liar's Father and Destiny**

The first liar was the devil. He lied through the serpent to Eve concerning the results that would come when she violated God's prohibition to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He has not ceased to lie to mankind nor solicit the services of many

to perpetuate his lies. Jesus called him a *"liar and the father of all lies"* (John 8:44).

The liar's destiny is hell (Revelation 22:15). *"Without are the dogs, socerers, the idolaters and every one that loveth and maketh a lie."* Revelation 21:8, *"...all liars... shall be in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone which is the second death."*

In contrast, Paul said that Christians are to think on those things that are true and of good report. Our Lord is the very essence of truth and the personification of it. We must also be a people of truth, speaking the truth as well as living the truth.

### **Covetousness Forbidden**

The tenth commandment takes into account the inner thoughts of people. In some ways it is the most difficult of all the Ten Commandments to obey because it does rule and regulate the heart of man. Exodus 20:17, *"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's."* Luke 12:15, *"Take heed and keep yourselves from all covetousness."* Then the Lord added, *"A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."* Paul said that covetousness is on the same wicked level as idolatry. He used idolatry to define covetousness. Does not this tell us Deity's attitude toward being covetous?

Covetousness is behind many violations of the other commandments. Desiring anything unlawfully that is thy neighbor's covers a great many things. It may be his honor, position, trust, affection, rank, reputation, status or good name that can be coveted by others. Men's eyes are entertained by the glitter of things they do not have. Materialistic designs and ambitions have overwhelmed the good sense of many masses of people. This greed and aspiration for the wealth of this world has caused people to do some of the most unmentionable things in order to have what they coveted. How many sins are compounded because of a covetous heart?

Obedience to this tenth commandment strikes a death blow at the root of all evil, the love of money. If one does not covet, have an unlawful desire for material gain, he does not have such love for material possessions and will avoid committing the grave evils so often committed by mankind in order to get, get, get.

Leaders of God's people in both the Old and New Testaments

were not to be covetous people. So contagious is this sin of the heart that Christians are to avoid company with those who are greedy and covetous.

### **A Futile Pursuit**

Man's ceaseless desire for material things is folly. What if he gains the whole world? He must soon turn it over to someone else in but a relatively brief time. If he gains the whole world and loses his soul, which is quite likely as he pursues the fleeting riches of the earth, he has made a terribly bad deal. The history of wealth and wealthy people shows that material things of life do not bring contentment regardless of how much one might gain and control. One's earthly happiness and spiritual blessedness, his peace of mind and salvation cannot be purchased or received through possessions. Life is composed of things far more important than such as that.

Religious people are not always free from covetousness even though following faithfully the religion of Christ will drive covetousness from the heart. Demas was a religious man and a companion and fellow worker with the apostle Paul. But he loved the offerings of this present world and forsook Paul and all that he and Paul had together upheld. Annanias and Sapphira had possessions but it proved to be their undoing when their greed and selfishness provoked them to lie about their contributions. Covetousness has caused people to lie, steal, commit adultery, murder, dishonor parents and God, violate every commandment in every imaginable fashion.

### **Not Only the Rich**

What many do not realize is that covetousness is not simply a sin of the rich. Doubtless many who are rich are subject to being covetous and may well be. This was true of certain ones in the Biblical record. Many, upon becoming rich, are no longer covetous because they have what they coveted. The poor are subject to being covetous because they do not have what others have and have not attained the level of possessions they crave. Most of the examples of covetousness in the Bible have to do with those who are not wealthy, such as servants, stewards, and men of lesser estate value. Are there any people anywhere who would dare claim they are immune from the temptation and spiritual disease of being covetous? We are all subject to this

temptation toward this sin and must stand alert and on guard.

### **Another View**

All covetousness is not sinful, but at least once was actually admonished. Paul urged his Corinthian brethren to "*covet earnestly the best gifts*" (First Corinthians 12:31). All desire is not evil. Immoderate, excessive and unlawful desire is sinful. There are desires that are right and uplifting to mankind while there are desires that, if fulfilled, degrade and produce spiritual damnation. We must learn to covet that which is good to the extent we can better serve the Lord. But we must be careful not to covet that which is forbidden. Even in coveting what is right we must be sure of our motives for wanting the good and make those motives pure and honorable. We should never do evil in order to fulfill desires even for that which is good.

As with all of the other vices which are resisted, condemned and opposed in the Ten Commandments, the cure is found only in Christ. Jesus kept all of the commandments perfectly. To understand our relationship between ourselves and material things, God and eternity, and understand as Christ would have us understand, we must have a heart free of covetousness.

### **Principles Abide**

The Ten Commandments were a part of the law that God gave Israel through Moses. That law has been nailed to the cross, taken out of the way, is no longer binding on anybody, not even the Jews. But the principles, and even some of the specifics of the Ten Commandments are binding upon everyone because they are a part of the law of Christ under whose authority we all live and before whom we shall stand in judgment.

As great as the Ten Commandments were and are, they do not contain the way of forgiveness, the way of eternal life, the plan of salvation. One should not allow himself or herself to be misled, as many falsely teach, that obeying the Ten Commandments will take you to heaven. There is much more to obeying the will of God than just the things taught in the Ten Commandments. But these are certainly a vital part, under Christ, in doing the will of the Lord.

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# **What Kind of Church Ought We To Be?**

## **NUMBER ONE**

Together we form a local congregation. What kind of church are we? I am not asking what is our name, or even the doctrine we teach, believe and practice, although these things are vitally important. The world has varying ways of defining and identifying a church. It may be big or small in number; popular or unpopular; strict or loose; conservative or liberal; Catholic or Protestant; or other distinctions with which the world is acquainted. But regardless of man's classifications, the important question is, "Are we the kind of church the Lord approves?" This is what counts. If God does not approve, nothing else really matters at all.

We can know what God approves by studying the congregations of the New Testament. Those churches, like the one to which we belong, were composed of people. They had good points and shortcomings. In the Scriptures the good is commended and the bad is exposed, condemned and corrected. By closely observing the Lord's approval or disapproval through the teaching of the apostles we can know what God wants, expects, accepts and rejects. This teaching enables us to shun the evil and pursue the good.

There is no better church to serve as an example than the church in Philippi. That church never seems to have given Paul an anxious moment. We learn of it in Acts and the letter to the Philippians primarily, but from other books as well. Nearly everything said of it was commendable with words of encouragement which make it a good church to imitate.

### **Established**

Acts fifteen and sixteen records the establishment of the church in Philippi. Paul was on his second missionary journey, having visited several churches he had established on his first journey. The Holy Spirit directed him from Asia to Troas. In Troas Paul saw a vision of a man from Macedonia saying, "*Come over into Macedonia and help us.*" He obeyed that call,

entered the continent of Europe, went to the city of Philippi and preached the gospel.

The first converts were Lydia and those of her household. He found them worshipping alongside a river and gave them opportunity to hear the gospel. They heard, believed and obeyed the Lord in baptism.

Later, Paul was in prison because he offended the local soothsayers. But this gave him opportunity to preach the gospel to the jailor who heard, believed and obeyed. These conversions marked the beginning of the Lord's church in that city and on that continent. The church in this city was composed of both Jews and Gentiles.

This church was the kind that caused Paul to be thankful to God for them every time he thought of them. Philippians 1:3,4, *"I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making request with joy."* Are we the kind of church this inspired apostle would commend in such fashion? It was not the case of every church with which Paul was acquainted. But there were good reason for Paul's attitude toward them.

### **Organized**

This church was properly organized. Philippians 1:1, *"Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons."* They showed respect for God's governmental arrangement for the church. A bishop is the same as an elder as is evidenced in Acts twenty where Paul asked the elders of Ephesus to meet him and he referred to them as bishops or overseers. There was not one bishop over several churches but a plurality of bishops over each congregation.

We can conclude that these men were qualified to serve in this capacity. It is unthinkable that Paul would be grateful for a church that allowed men to serve as leaders who ignored God's qualifications as found in Titus one and First Timothy three. This church, and many since then, was blessed with the right kind of leadership. Just having men who are called elders is not sufficient nor proper. More attention must be given to those who assume the oversight of local congregations. For too long this has not been handled Biblically and men who are not qualified have occupied these influential places far too long and too often.

## **Liberal in Giving**

The church in Philippi was also one that was liberal in giving. Paul help up the Macedonian churches as examples for the church in Corinth to imitate in the matter of giving (Second Corinthians 8:1-5). They gave liberally even though they were poor. They urged Paul to accept their gifts. They even gave, Paul said, beyond their power. Do you think the congregation to which you belong deserves such a distinction?

They were steadfast in their support of Paul in his labors. Chapter one, verse five, *"For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now."* Chapter four, verse sixteen, *"For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity."* This indicates their missionary and benevolent spirit. They gave of their own accord. As Paul stated in Second Corinthians 8:5, *"But first they gave their own selves to the Lord."* If there is a "secret" to successful giving, this is it. One who has given himself or herself will likely, readily, willingly, actively and steadfastly give of their means. God approves churches who are like this church in this area.

## **Steady**

The Philippian church was steady in its work. It was not "on fire" one day and lukewarm or cold the next. Paul noted, *"from the first day until now"* they had been aggressively active in their doing good. They were zealous, diligent, intent on growing in faith and standing firm and true. He spoke of their *"progress and joy in the faith,"* (1:25), and how they were *"standing fast in one spirit, with one soul striving for the faith of the gospel, in nothing affrighted by the adversary."* (1:27).

Churches can engage in good works authorized of God with zeal and fervor, but if they are not attentive, they can become sluggish and sloppy in their work. When such occurs, everything that can be done to revive its efforts ought to be done. It is hard to stay on "top" all the time, but good churches are reliable and dependable because they never slacken their pace but are always pushing the cause of Christ to the world. It is the constant and steady growth that endures. The spurts and explosions may provoke headlines in brotherhood "brag sheets" but the church in Philippi was not of that sort.

## **Love**

Another quality of the brethren in Philippi that every church must desire was their brotherly love and devotion. They loved the Lord above everything and everybody else. This caused them to be devoted to His cause. This also made them love one another. Love for God leads one to love His Word, love the lost, and love the faithful brethren with a specialty. It was love that tied them together in unity in Christ because they stood together for the truth in doctrine and practice. Paul knew the value of brotherly love and also knew how limiting the lack of love is on any congregation.

There were several admonitions Paul gave these good brethren. Knowing that the devil never ceases to seek the undoing of faithful brethren, Paul spoke to them, not so much to correct as to assist them in preventing error. In chapter three, verses 12-14, *"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."* Paul knew the necessity to keep on keeping on. He encouraged this in them because he knew faithfulness was essential.

## **Heart and Life**

High in his thoughts was their unity. Chapter two, verses one through four takes note of the value of being likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord and one mind. He urged humility (2:5-8) in the likeness of Christ. He reminded them to continue their working (2:12-16). Concerning their manner of life, he said, (1:27), *"Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ."* As for fears, trials and harassments Paul gave them admonitions in Chapter four, verses six, seven and nineteen that would sustain them.

Paul knew the concern for the inner man and the thought of the heart. Chapter four, verses eight and nine, *"Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things, which ye have both learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace*

*shall be with you."*

Such was the church at Philippi. It was organized, liberal in giving, mission and benevolent minded, consistent in work, always doing its best rather than a "hit and miss" program, growing in unity, standing steadfast in doctrine, known for its love and one that was considered by Paul to have respect for warnings and encouragements to faithfulness.

Is this the kind of church we are where we are members? To what extent are we like they were? What efforts do we intend to make to improve the situation and be more like them? We can all do better and should resolve to be a part of efforts to make things more as they should be. Paul described what that church was to him. He called it an "*odor of sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God.*" (4:18). It is important how we rate before God.

† † † † †

## ***What Kind of Church Ought We To Be?***

### **NUMBER TWO**

This is a second lesson with this same title. But the approaches are different. We together make up a local church. What kind of church are we? We speak not of size in numbers, wealth of the members, and certainly have no reference to denominational identity because the Lord's church is not a denomination. But we are concerned only with whether we have God's approval. Without that nothing else really matters.

As we noted in the first lesson, regardless of what other people think or what we think of ourselves, what God accepts is what is important. We can know what God wants, expects, approves and condemns by studying the churches revealed in the New Testament such as the churches in Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, Philippi, the seven churches in Asia and others. In this lesson we have compiled several traits which we are certain ought to characterize every congregation.

## **Authority**

We must be a church where Christ is the supreme authority. One of the real weaknesses evident among present-day churches is the laxity toward authority. Christ has all authority (Matthew 28:18), and is head of the church (Colossians 1:18). The church is not a democracy as some denominations boast. All matters of faith have been settled and revealed in God's Word. God speaks to us through His Son (Hebrews 1:1,2), and we are to hear Him (Matthew 17:5). Too much in religion has been determined by what people want, like, prefer, traditions and human philosophies, feelings and other such unworthy standards. What we do must be "*in the name of*" Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:17), and this demands a "*thus saith the Lord.*" We must "*speak as the oracles of God*" (First Peter 4:11).

## **Worship**

We ought to be a church of people who are faithful in worship. This is certainly not the case with many. Hebrews 10:25 still applies. It is a sin to forsake the assembling together. The question, "Do I have to attend all the services of the church?" never falls from the lips of faithful brethren. They do not consider worshipping God a "have to" matter but a "get to" matter. Faithful brethren never have to be begged to worship.

## **Liberal in Giving**

Alongside these things, we must be a church that is liberal in giving. Prosperity may be the downfall of many professed Christians. We can become too selfish, indulgent, skimpy and tight-fisted to contribute as we should. Worldly pursuits can take first place. We live in a land of abundance and this can be a temptation to put too much confidence in material things. The secret formula to giving is to first give ourselves to God as did the early Christians (Second Corinthians 8:5). You never have to beg people to give liberally who have given themselves to God. It comes naturally for them to give of their means.

## **Working**

We ought to be a church that is concerned with doing the work that God gave the church to do. The work of the church is

saving souls by the preaching of the gospel. Nothing is superior to that and nothing should be allowed to supplant that. This requires a knowledge of the gospel, a love for the Word of God, a love for the lost, and a determination to do this work. *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,"* is still the charge to God's people.

Too many churches already have detoured themselves from this thrust and have embarked on efforts of recreation, secular education, entertainment, and have become not much more than a country club. Doctrine is either ignored, ridiculed or suppressed, but getting numbers and money, having recreation centers which are called "family life centers" for fun and games, have taken over the efforts and energies of many. These things have no place in the work of the church, but are only indications of the extent of apostasy among brethren and the disregard to do what is authorized and not go beyond Scripture.

### **Singing That Lies**

A problem in our time is the risk of singing lies. We sing "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord," but will not even be faithful in worship. "I Love To Tell The Story," we sing, but who have we told lately? "We'll Work 'Till Jesus Comes," and from the look of things some must believe He has come and now they have quit. "Rescue the Perishing," but how many can we name we have rescued in the past year? "Stand Up, Stand Up, For Jesus" has been heard in the halls of worship, but many seemed ashamed of the faith and the exclusive and inclusive nature of the gospel plan of salvation. Digression, compromise, support of false teachers, "go-along-ism" has captivated the mind and ways of many. Another song that ought to haunt us is, "Must I Go Empty Handed?" Has our record of reaching the lost been productive? So much effort over the past years has been directed toward fighting movements among us that destroy the faith that we have slackened the evangelistic fervor that should characterize the church.

### **Truth**

We ought and must be a church where the truth is upheld. Regardless of whatever else we do, if we do not hold to the truth our efforts are for naught. Truth is under attack in society, religiously, politically, by denominationalists to the feminists,

liberals, in and out of the church, in schools, homes, government, everywhere. Sacred values are denounced and being replaced by the revolution of man against God. Our task is the proclamation of truth. We must defend it, stand by it, live it, without compromise and appeasement to anyone, anytime, anywhere for any reason. It is tragic to see churches that once were known for their soundness and steadfastness now drifting with the currents of digression, seeking peace at the cost of truth, compromising with false teachers, going along definitely, ignorantly with error and apostasy. Schools, papers, preachers, elderships are being subverted under the barrage of "unity in diversity."

The church is not to seek the path that may be popular to the world, but the path the Lord has trod. That which attracts the most people is not necessarily that which is right. Many have failed to understand this and have concluded that numerical growth is success. Some make quite a display of large financial contributions, often the money being directed into efforts that are not even the work of the church at all. If a church does not teach sound doctrine, defend sound doctrine, and its members strive to live according to sound doctrine, whatever else may be said of it amounts to nothing because it is not approved of God.

### **Active**

The Lord's church should be aggressive, zealous and consistent in its activity. We always have need to improve. But there is no reason to be impressed with "flash in the pan" explosions, gimmicks, booster schemes that bring reproach on the noble and sacred cause of Christ. To watch some churches operate you would think they are more like a circus than a congregation of the saved.

It is also painfully noted that many churches that claim to be "conservative" in doctrine are dead because they do little to nothing for fear that they will do something wrong. Some of the wild and digression activities among us are provoked by gross inactivity among those who loudly shout for sound doctrine but do so little. Doing nothing is already wrong. While lukewarm, haphazard, half-hearted approaches to the work of the Lord is reprehensible, we are expected to do more than just "keep house and hold our own." At least we must be militantly persistent in trying to get the job done. Discouragements are bountiful in number, but we cannot afford to become weary in



well doing. If we do not engage in the cause of Christ with interest, enthusiasm and dedication, just how do you think we shall ever impress anyone else to be concerned? It ought not take brethren weeks, months, even years to make decisions and be about the Father's business. Neither ought we confuse "busy-ness" with the Father's business. We are to be a people ready unto every good work and go about our work with diligence and with all our heart.

Many other traits mark a church as being what God approves, such as being Scripturally organized, with brethren having unfeigned love one for another, where members guard their tongues lest they sow seeds of strife and discord, with a exhibition of cooperation and concern for the welfare of others. Yes, you have heard all this said before. But I am reminded of the story told about Marshall Keeble who went to a place to preach in a gospel meeting. His first sermon was on repentance. His second sermon was also about repentance. Nobody commented to him about it, however, thinking he might have forgotten what he had preached earlier. But when his third sermon was also on repentance several confronted him and wanted an explanation why he did not preach something else. He said, "You have not done that yet, and that is why I keep preaching it." Preachers keep saying these things to brethren and some grow tired of hearing them, but so few are really doing anything about what they hear.

You read in the Bible about the churches in Rome, Philippi, Berea and many other places. Paul had words of commendation for many of them because of their faith, their assistance in spreading the gospel, their love and sincerity. He noted their willingness to accept and respond to words of correction. He was aware of their stedfastness and faithfulness to truth. If the Holy Spirit wrote a special letter to the church to which you belong, similar to the letters the Lord sent to the churches of Asia, what could be commended? What might be condemned? Let us be aware that the letters to the churches of the New Testament apply to churches today as far as teaching us what God expects of us. Whether God approves of the church to which we belong or not depends on the members, what they are, what they are doing, where they stand and the direction they are going. How is it where you attend?

† † † † †

# **The Master's Touch**

Luke 8:43-48, *"And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, came behind him and touched the border of his garment; immediately her issue of blood stanch'd. And Jesus said, Who touched me? When all denied, Peter and they that were with him said, Master, the multitude thronged thee, and sayest thou, Who touched me? And Jesus said, Somebody hath touched me; for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me. And when the woman saw that she was not hid, she came trembling, and falling down before him, she declared unto him before all the people for what cause she had touched him, and how she was healed immediately. And he said unto her, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace."*

At the beginning of this account we see a diseased woman. She had made every effort to recover her health, even spending all she had. At the end of the account we have the same woman but now healed. The passage also indicates that she was spiritually well also because of the saying of Christ for her to be of comfort. With faith in her heart she had touched the Master. The difference between the woman at the start and the woman at the end was the contact she had with Jesus Christ. From someone sick, ordinary and sinful she had been changed into someone pure, whole and healthy by His touch.

## **Sought His Touch**

Wherever Jesus went He was thronged by people who sought even to touch Him and receive His touch. Luke 6:19, *"And the whole multitude sought to touch him; for there went virtue out of him, and healed them all."* Mark 3:10, *"For he had healed many: insomuch that they pressed upon him for to touch him, as many as had plagues."* Mathew 14:34-36, *"And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret, and when the men of that place had knowledge of him, they sent out into all that country round about, and brought unto him all that were diseased; and besought him that they might only touch the hem of his garment; and as many as touched were made perfectly whole."*

The influence of Jesus, His touch on their lives, their coming in contact with Him, having His hands and His imprint upon them made their lives worthwhile, restored, valuable and wonderful.

### **The Touch of the Master's Hand**

'Twas battered, scarred, and the auctioneer  
Thought it scarcely worth his while  
To waste time on the old violin  
But he held it up with a smile.  
"What am I bidden, good people," he cried,  
"Who'll start the bidding for me?  
A dollar, a dollar; now two, only two,  
Two dollars, and who'll make it three?  
Three dollars once, three dollars twice,  
Going for three?" But no!  
From the room far away a gray haired man  
Came forward and picked up the bow.  
Then wiping the dust from the old violin  
And tightening up the strings,  
He played a melody pure and sweet,  
As sweet as an angel sings.

The music ceased and the auctioneer  
With a voice that was quiet and low,  
Said, "What am I bid for this old violin?"  
And he held it up with the bow.  
"A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two,  
Two thousand, and who'll make it three?  
Three thousand once, three thousand twice,  
And going, and gone," said he.  
The people cheered and some of them cried,  
"We don't quite understand.  
What changed its worth?"  
Swiftly came the reply,  
"The touch of the masters hand."

And many a man with life out of tune,  
And battered and torn with sin,  
Is auctioned cheap to a thoughtless crowd  
Much like the old violin.  
A mess of pottage, a glass of wine,

A game, and he travels on,  
He going once, and going twice,  
He going and almost gone.  
But the Master comes and the foolish crowd  
Never can quite understand,  
The worth of a soul and the change that's wrought  
By the touch of the Master's hand.

### **The Leper**

Christ is our Master. What has the Master's touch meant in times past? Matthew 8:1-3, *"When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed."* In this case the Master's touch was a cleansing touch. The defiled and unclean man with a disease that was gradually destroying his body, cut off from society, no cure being known, was cleansed.

Leprosy is a type of sin because sin defiles, makes one unfit and unclean before God. It destroys man spiritually. Man alone possesses no cure. Jesus showed His power over leprosy and in so doing His power over sin. The Master's touch meant that the man was no longer defiled and unclean, but could be readmitted to society and association with others. So the spiritual touch of the Master, our contact with Him, will bring our readmission into the presence of God, clean and pure with sins forgiven.

### **Peter's Mother-in-Law**

Matthew 8:14-16, *"And when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she arose, and ministered unto them. When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils; and he cast out spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick."*

Troubled by fever and weakened by it, the Master's touch not only brought healing, but quiet and reassurance, giving relief that allowed her to return to useful service. So with us! Life is often upset by turmoil as we struggle under the havoc, violence, disappointment and destruction that invades our lives. But the touch of Christ in life can restore us to useful service to God and man.

## **His Disciples**

On another occasion the touch of Jesus reassured His frightened disciples. Matthew 17:5-8, *"While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only."*

Fear often possesses the heart. Nothing in life is sure. Many things bring us insecurity. There is nothing in this world in which we can place full trust and confidence. Though we long for security it is not to be found except through the Master's touch. His touch gives us hope, confidence, strength and peace that nothing else can provide, and that cannot be wrested from us. His promises not only comfort us in this life but give us joy and gladness that we shall be God's heirs of eternal life.

## **The Blind and Deaf**

Matthew 9:27-31, *"And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed him, crying, and saying, Thou son of David, have mercy on us. And when he was come into the house, the blind men came to him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto him, Yea, Lord. Then touched he their eyes saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it."*

The touch of Jesus is an illuminating touch. It was said of Him that He went about doing good, including making the blind to see.

But there is a blindness far more deadly than physical blindness. That is spiritual blindness in sin. Jesus said of some, *"Having ears they hear not; having eyes they see not."* Many are spiritually blind, religiously blind, not even aware that such is the case with them. We must learn God's will to be sure we are not among that number. Only by seizing the Master's hand, being guided by His touch, can we escape the spiritual blindness and be lights in a world of sinful darkness.

The touch of Jesus was also a liberating touch. Mark 7:32-35, *"And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and they beseech him to put his hand*

*upon him. And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue, and looking up into heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. And straitway his ears were opened and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain."* Being physically deaf and unable to speak is pictured as being in bondage. Jesus liberated this person from this physical captivity and by His touch people can be liberated from spiritual bondage also.

There is a bondage that cannot be compared because of its devastation. That is being in the bondage of sin and servitude of Satan. One may be able to physically hear and speak and at the same time be in a far worse handicapped state than those physically burdened. One who stops his ears and closes his eyes to things spiritual is the world's most pitiable prisoner. Truth sets one free (John 8:32). Jesus liberated this man of whom we spoke, and He is the One that can liberate us from the bondage of sin. This was His very mission to this earth (Luke 19:10; First Timothy 1:15).

There are additional things that could be said of the touch of Jesus. It was a touch of healing, cleansing, reassurance, illumination, liberation and was ministered with compassion and tenderness. He showed tender love toward little children when He touched them. There was the time with Jairus and his daughter, an occasion when His touch brought life (Luke 8:54), like the raising of the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:14).

As we study the times when the touch of Jesus is mentioned, two facts come to mind: (1) the power of the Master's touch; (2) not once did Jesus force His touch upon anyone, but each time it was sought and willingly received. Jesus brought Himself within reach, but only when people reached for Him, desired Him to come into their midst, truly wanting contact with Him, did His touch bring forth the blessings.

Jesus makes Himself available to us. He is not far from any of us. But to be blessed by His touch we must desire and seek it with faith in our hearts and in obedience. When we do receive the Master's touch in our lives we will be far better than before.

"Have thine own way, Lord, Have thine own way,  
Wounded and weary, help me I pray,  
Power, all power, surely is thine,  
Touch me and heal me, Savior divine."

† † † † †



## **Ashamed to Answer**

I was privileged to read a series of questions asked of one who claims to be a gospel preacher, but he would not answer. One of his elders did answer, but said those who inquired ought to be ashamed for asking them and blasting them as dangerous hypocrites. Of course, he signed his notation with "love."

Is it shameful to ask what one believes about the inspiration of the Bible, the kingdom, mechanical instruments of music, the work of the Holy Spirit, the creation, the Lord's Supper, baptism, worldliness such as drinking alcoholic beverages, dancing, mixed bathing, divorce, women leading prayer, modern versions, heaven and hell, spiritual gifts, fellowship of denominations, etc.?

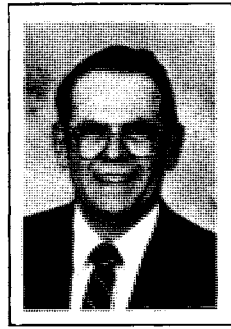
Since we are taught to give answer for what we believe, why is it shameful to ask others what they believe? Why call those who inquire dangerous hypocrites? Could it be because the one who was asked does not believe truth and prefers to hide that fact? We contend the shame belongs to those who will not answer such relevant, pertinent and timely questions. We commend those who want to know what is believed.

\* \* \* \* \*

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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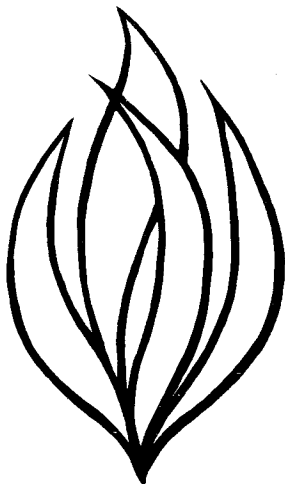
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# A Burning Fire



*"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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## THIS ISSUE

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# **Holding Up Each Other's Hands**

Exodus 17:8-13, *"Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron and Hur went up to the top of the hill. And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword."*

Israel had but shortly crossed the Red Sea in their deliverance from Egypt. They began to encounter various obstacles as they went through the wilderness toward Sinai, such as food and water shortages. But they also were faced with the nomadic people, such as the Amalekites, that raided and pillaged their victims with hit and run tactics.

## **Moses, Joshua, Aaron, Hur**

Israel won a great victory against these raiding parties in this account, but notice the people that were prominently mentioned in that victory. There was Moses, God's chosen leader of Israel and possibly the greatest leader the nation ever was to have. There was Aaron, his brother and mouthpiece, who would soon become the first high priest and a prominent man in the early history of Israel. There was Joshua, the eventual successor to Moses, a mighty man of war and of faith. There was also a man named Hur who is mentioned only twice in Scripture. He is but a minor character relatively speaking; certainly not in the same class as the previous three. But we see him here in an important role. From this we learn that there is no such thing as an unimportant person, especially when that person is doing the will of God.

During the fighting that occurred, Moses held forth the rod of God. That rod was used to often during the Israelite sojourn from Egypt to Canaan. That was the rod thrown before Pharaoh that turned into a serpent. It was stretched over the Red Sea when it was parted. Moses used it to smite the rock from which came forth water. It was an instrument through which the power and authority of God was manifested. When Moses upheld the rod over the field of battle Israel prevailed. The opposite resulted when, having grown weary, he let down the rod to rest his hands. It was here that Aaron and Hur performed such a simple but invaluable service by holding up Moses' hands during the time he was too weary to do so by himself.

### **A Constant Warfare**

Let us draw a lesson from the principle in operation in this event. The forces of good and evil are in constant warfare. It is not a physical but a spiritual warfare (Second Corinthians 10:4). The power of God unto salvation is the gospel of Christ (Romans 1:16). The Lord's Word is the sword of the Spirit (Ephesians 6:17). When the Word of God is held aloft the forces of Jesus prevail. But, as when Moses alone could not uphold the rod over the conflict with Amalek, neither can just one successfully fight the battle alone without help from others. Not just the leaders can carry on the fight, but it takes the "Hurs" also. We are all to be soldiers of the cross in the army of the Lord. As such, we must cooperate and assist each other. We have an obligation to hold up each others hands as we uphold the Word of God. When we support, encourage and relieve one another, we are doing more than rendering service to each other. We are supporting the cause of Christ in which we are all enlisted to fight.

How frustrating, confusing and disheartening it is to think that you do not have the support of others while you are doing the work of the Lord! In the Old Testament we read of Elijah who was once so discouraged that he thought he was the only one that loved the Lord. He was informed that there were seven thousand that had not bowed to Baal. But having gone so long without support and encouragement, fighting battle after battle, his spirit, zeal, determination and even his courage had waned. He was so bent, nearly broken, that he was ready to quit and die and let everything just go.

It is doubtlessly true today that many faithful brethren are

pushed almost to the same point. Many good works are never accomplished, possibly never even attempted, because we fail to hold up each other's hands. Preachers get discouraged. Elders can be made to feel useless and ineffective because it seems nobody cares. Possibly members of the church drift into digression and apostasy for much the same reason. We are taught to *"bear one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ."* (Galatians 6:2).

### **How To Do It**

Consider some ways we can hold up each other's hands. More than most realize, faithful attendance at worship services is a boost to others. At times elderships have soldiers in the army that act as if they have no responsibility because they are full of excuses, often negligent and indifferent, haphazard in their worship. How would you like to preach for a congregation, and preach faithfully the truth that must hear and believe to be saved, the truth that brethren say they endorse, but the membership, at least a sizeable portion of it, is absent time after time? How would you like to labor with those who complain when they are urged to be faithful? Is that holding up each other's hands? Is that upholding the power of God?

How would you like to prepare a lesson, as Bible class teachers do regularly, and then so few show up for the class as if what was being done really did not matter to them? We are such hindrances to each other by absenteeism. This deliberate absenteeism is one of the greatest problems facing the Lord's church today. There may be several causes for it, but it reduces itself to a love of this world and a disinterest in the cause of Christ, even among professed "Christians." Members run into problems in life, and rather than leaning more heavily on the Lord, they take it out on the Lord by disassociating themselves from His and His people. Why is that?

I know of no surer way to discourage fellow Christians than to think your presence at worship is not important. Do we really have the right to treat God and each other that way? We are duty bound to support the efforts made to proclaim the message of truth to a lost world. We need to help each other.

### **Cooperation**

We can hold up each other's hands by working in harmony

and unity with those of like precious faith, cooperating under the leadership. It takes very little character when everything is going your way to cooperate. Most anyone can create harmony and unity if they get their way in every matter. It is on those occasions when decisions and programs that may not be altogether to your liking that you are called upon to demonstrate real character. We are speaking of matters of human judgment and opinion, not matters of revealed faith. The eldership of a congregation must guide the entire body in such matters. Not everybody can always be one hundred per cent pleased every time. Nor should anyone think they have to be. We need to learn to work WITH brethren rather than AGAINST them; responding to the call of work with the attitude of cooperation. Standing with oneness in doctrine as we must, we should strive for harmony in the performance of our task.

### **Giving**

Another way we hold up each other's hands is through giving. It goes without saying that the financial part of the Lord's work is more than one or even a few can carry. It takes everyone doing as they ought. In most congregations the bulk of the contribution comes from a minority. This is not always because the minority has greater wealth, but because the minority gives as the Bible teaches us all to give. When one does not give as he or she ought, he suffers a three-fold harm. One, he is deprived of the blessings that come with liberality and sacrifice. Two, it is an unfairness to brethren to allow them to carry the financial ball while you also enjoy the use of facilities and rejoice in progress that you did not help promote. Third, and this counts most of all, failure to give as you ought is to disobey God. Does that matter to you? It should!

### **Living**

There are many other ways to hold up each other's hands, but one additional suggestion we offer in this study. Supporting the truth by a godly life and offering an encouraging word is uplifting to everyone around you. When brethren suffer difficulties in life, what a benefit for them to have their brethren speak words of genuine concern and consolation, offer a helping hand, help them through the hard places and rough side of the mountain, lifting them up when they stumble. When sin

overtakes a brother, do we not see how we need to hold up each other, not condoning or winking at sin, but seeking to restore the fallen one to faithfulness again?

We all recognize that an ungodly life by a member of the church inflicts harm on the whole body. How many times have people been turned away from the truth that is preached because of the hypocrisy in the lives of those who profess to uphold it? I recall preaching a sermon on a moral issue with which most have no real problem as far as verbally endorsing the lesson. But later one who was present but was not a member of the church came to me and told me that he knew for a fact that some of the leaders in the congregation did not believe what I preached and violated the truth in their lives. Whether that was true or not, I at first could not tell. It later proved to have been true. But the truth is often buried beneath the rubbish of ungodliness in the lives of church members. Is this upholding the truth? Is this upholding each other? Certainly not! The religious faith of many good brethren has been held up for ridicule because other brethren subvert it by wickedness. We must never be apologetic about the truth. We are not the originators of it, but the proclaimers of it. We have the task to teach it and practice it. Failure to do so is detrimental to everyone. Godliness is one way of upholding each other, even as we strive to assist each other in getting to heaven.

We may never be a Moses, an Aaron, or a Joshua. But there is not one Christian who cannot be a Hur and hold up the hands of others, such a preacher, teachers, elderships, and good brethren as they labor faithfully and soundly in their tasks. We are to help each other reach the glories of heaven. Is there a nobler endeavor in which we could be involved? Help each other!

† † † † †

(continued from page 24)

These are words of optimism, wisdom, hope and determination that embody the ideas of retrospection, introspection and propsection.

Let us close this lesson with the earnest admonition that we all spend some time and thought in retrospection, introspection and propsection. It will make a difference, both in this life and in eternity.

† † † † †

# Nothing But Leaves

Mark 11:12-14, 20-25, "And on the morrow when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry: And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon. And when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter forever. And his disciples heard it... And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance said unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

This is the record of an event just prior to the crucifixion. There are two matters of concern in the passage: (1) the power of faith and prayer, and (2) the action regarding the fig tree. Our concern in this lesson is with this action. It has been a puzzle to many. Another lesson shall discuss the first subject.

## The Event

Let us understand what actually happened. Christ saw a fig tree. There were leaves on the tree. He went to get fruit from it, but He found nothing but leaves. He pronounced a curse upon the tree and it withered. This was not a fit of anger nor a deed of vengeance, but an object lesson demonstrating a certain truth He was presenting. In doing this action, Jesus was not unlike many of the prophets of old who also acted many of their prophecies to make them more understandable.

Jeremiah buried a garment, allowed it to rot, and declared that Judah would likewise be destroyed. He once took a bottle and broke it, saying that Jerusalem would also be broken.

Ezekiel imposed upon himself a famine to demonstrate the



famine that would come to Judah. He also took a hair and cut it into three pieces, burning one, throwing another to the wind, and cutting the third with a sword, but keeping back a small portion of it. By this he illustrated what was to come upon Judah, burning, scattering, death, but the preservation of a remnant. So the action of Jesus was an object lesson. It was also the manifestation of miraculous power. It was not one of destruction of what was good, but a constructive act through the destruction of what deserved destruction. Jesus was demonstrating a side of Deity that some tend to forget; namely, that God, although merciful, is also capable of executing justice and severity. Jesus would have presented the Father deceptively if, while showing God's compassion, He had not also shown His wrath against what deserved it.

### **Justified Indignation**

Why was Jesus so indignant toward the tree? There are two important reasons. But we must understand something of the nature of the fig tree to understand the reasons. Figs appear before the leaves. The presence of leaves would indicate the presence of fruit if the tree was producing as it ought. It was not the time to expect fruit, but the tree gave the impression it bore fruit by the presence of its leaves. The tree presented itself to be something it was not. It stood as a lie; guilty of pretense; and example of hypocrisy. It was stealing nutrition from the soil, but did not deserve the space it occupied because it was not doing what it was supposed to do.

Jesus showed at other times His displeasure when something that has a function, purpose and mission was not performing that function. Matthew 3:10, the words of John the Baptist, *"And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire."* 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."* Matthew 5:13, *"Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is henceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under the foot of men."* Luke 13:6-9, *"He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on*

*this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it; and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."* One can be patient and longsuffering with that which does not perform properly, making every effort to give it time and opportunity, giving it assistance. But one must realize there comes a time when nothing works and the thing that is of no value needs to be removed.

### **Symbol of Evil**

The fig tree stood as a symbol of conditions then and now. The Jews were guilty of hypocrisy, talking one way but acting another. All their talk was not in error. *Matthew 23:3, "All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works; for they say, and do not."* *James 1:22,23, "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."*

This tree, by no bearing fruit, but only leaves, gave the appearance of goodness, but it was not good. It was guilty of pretense, not performance. So the bold action of Jesus was a stern condemnation of every form of hypocrisy and insincere showiness.

We have a function, purpose and mission. Solomon said, *"Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."* *Ecclesiastes 12:13.* We are to glorify God, spread the tidings of salvation, reflect the brilliance and beauty of Christ in our lives, bear good fruit, let our light shine to the glory of the Father in heaven, be the pillar and ground of the truth.

Jesus found the fig tree far from what He had a right to expect. Does He find the same in us? *John 15: 2,8, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit... Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."* Do we appear to be something we really are not?

### **Becoming and Being**

We recognize that there is more to serving God than BECOMING a Christian, even though this is absolutely essential. But there is also the duty of BEING a Christian and this involves bearing the kind of fruit Jesus wants.

One may ask, "But was there not something beneficial about the fig tree, even though it did not bear fruit?" Yes, it possibly gave shade, even provided a place where a bird might build a nest, etc. But that was not its primary purpose. As far as its primary duty was concerned, it was useless. I have a wristwatch. It might be used as a toy, a paper weight, an ornament or some other way. But if it will not keep reasonably accurate time, it is useless for the purpose for which it was made. (I have a watch like that and you probably do also.)

We see the Lord's displeasure with the fig tree because of its hypocrisy and because it was not fulfilling its primary function. Let us now make an application and learn and profit.

The Lord teaches us to attend worship. But even that can be only a show and pretense if we are not striving to live a Christlike life each day of life.

Membership in the church, the body of Christ, is essential to salvation, but if we considered it merely a mark of social respectability and do not assume the responsibilities of the body we are like the fig tree. Even prayer can be *"nothing but leaves"* if we do not pray with earnestness, faith, sincerity, according to His will, in His name, and couple prayer with a pure life. Prayer was a mark of hypocrisy for one man in Luke 18. Turn and read of him. Proverbs 28:9, *"He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination."*

### **Reason To Be**

As individuals and as a congregation we have a primary purpose for existence. It is not to gratify self and gather material accumulations. We are not here for mere social contracts, fellowship, benevolent deeds, etc. We are for the glorification of God by our lives and are to work for the salvation of the sinful souls around us by teaching them the saving gospel. It is not our aim to entertain, nor to operate a "fun and games" religion. We are not primarily given to calm emotions and soothe nerves. It is not our task to just try to make people feel good about themselves. A church may have much activity but it never really be *"nothing but leaves."* A church that fails in its duty to proclaim, defend and live by the truth is a church of leaves. But

God expects the church to be the pillar and ground of the truth (First Timothy 3:15). This truth is what the world desperately needs. Are we making anything more than a pretense, an outward appearance, a superficial showing?

Surely we can profit from this action of Jesus and we will if we allow it to motivate us to analyze ourselves as individuals and congregations to see if we are bearing fruit or just leaves. It is possible to have a lot of "busy-ness" and still not be doing the Father's business.

Before we can bear fruit we must be a part of the tree (John 15:1-8). We must become attached to the vine, who is Christ. This we do when we obey the gospel by believing in Christ, repenting of our sins, confessing our faith in Him, and being baptized into Him for the remission of sin. Then we are prepared and ready, and expected, to bear fruit.

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## ***Power to Remove Mountains***

This lesson is a companion study to the one immediately prior to it because they are taken from the same context of teaching found in Mark eleven. Mark 11:20-26, *"And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shalt not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye shall receive them, and ye shall have them. And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any; that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses."*

The grand and primary work of the Lord on the earth was to

provide atonement for mankind, the way for man to be saved from sin. It was His mission to seek and save the lost by making satisfactory reparation for man's offences against God, dying in man's stead, purchasing with His blood a people who would belong to God.

Not only did He come to provide the way to heaven, but to provide the way by which the way of salvation would be made known to every generation. This necessitated extensive effort by preparing His apostles for the work of taking the good news to the world. As time drew nearer for Him to die and return to heaven, His efforts took on an air of urgency and intensity. He warned against dangers they would encounter. He tried to prepare them for the suffering, disappointments and difficulties of infinite variety they would meet. But He also spoke to them words of assurance as they would go about the work of gathering souls for the Lord. Such is the theme of the words of our text.

### **To Whom the Application?**

These words were spoken to the apostles. But is there no application to us today? We contend that the sentiment of these assurances extend to all laborers in the Master's vineyard. The work of saving souls from sin, begun by the Lord with His life, death, burial and resurrection, continues to this day, being accomplished through human beings who preach the message of salvation He brought. Every Christian can appropriate this gracious language of the text as if it was addressed to him, as far as the major theme is concerned.

What exactly is the assurance given here? Consider again verse twenty-three. *"For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shalt not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith."* This is not to be understood literally. This is figurative language. The apostles are never reported to have actually moved literal mountains. His people were soon to enter upon a task which would seem as difficult as moving a mountain. The mountains represent the obstacles, adverse forces, hardship and troubles that awaited them. We use the word "mountain" in this sense in the popular song, "Climb Every Mountain." One who solves problems is sometimes called a "rooter up of mountains." The immorality of

paganism, bigotry and barbarism would seem insurmountable obstacles in the poathway of success in preaching the gospel.

The apostles needed and received assurance of power and strength sufficient for the task. They needed something superior to the foe. By these words Jesus assured them that not enemy was too great that they could not conquer by the power made available to the children of God.

### **We Need Power**

A faithful Christian is evidence of this power. He may be the lowliest and feeblest child in the kingdom and the world scarcely aware he is alive. Yet he wages a warfare against the flesh, battling against darkness. Sin and Satan strive to foment rebellion in his heart against the Savior. These are "mountains" in his way. But the "mountains" of temptation, discouragement, heartbreak are hewn down. The "mountains" of the guilt of sin and the sentence of spiritual death are made level. He presses on, gaining in goodness and cleansed of spiritual pollution until he finally triumphs into the eternal peace and joy of heaven with God. His existence and manner of life is living proof that he, as God's child, takes mountains and casts them aside.

Consider the struggle of the fellowship of faithful Christians generally. Our main assignment is to be the pillar and ground of the truth, the supporter, proclaimer and defender of it (First Timothy 3:15). We face enemies and are attacked by antagonists right and left. There are foes without and sometimes within that inflict discomfort. But as is the theme of Revelation, regardless of the foes, the church of God shall prevail. Truth is yet in the agony of conflict and contest and the battles are not all won. In spite of almost unbelievable barriers, God's people, like a mighty army, gives evidence of a power that is able to conquer the most severe hindrances. In this way we still show the capacity to cast mountains into the sea, such mountains as atheism, communism, tryranny, slothfulness, lukewarmness, ignorance, poverty, hunger, legalism, liberalism, egotism, division, denominationalism and all other blights on the human scene regarding the soul.

### **Power of Faith**

What is the secret of this marvellous power? Jesus said, "*Have faith in God.*" Faith in God is that power that produces

victory and overcomes the world. We are to have faith, not in ourselves by ourselves, but in God, expecting success, not because of our strength, but because of His. Though we are insufficient of ourselves to remove mountains and barriers to heaven, we become sufficient in Christ when God intercedes on our behalf (First Corinthians 10:13).

This faith is an act of the intellect, heart and soul of man. It is the acceptance of God as Creator, Preserver and Judge. It gives reverence for His love as manifested in Jesus Christ. It is a faith which even provokes man's conscience to respond, producing submission and obedience to the Word of the Lord. It recognizes the supremacy of good over evil, accepting the truth that man is capable of seeing, knowing and doing what is right before God.

The Lord tells His children not to doubt in their hearts. It is not always easy to remove all doubts. On every hand mankind is bombarded with skepticism and infidelity designed to destroy faith in God and create doubt. Doubt is the first step toward denial. We are told the Bible is insufficient, untured, uninspired, counterfeit and contradicts science. We are assured that the elements of heaven and earth came not by the Word of God but by some fantastic explosion of unknown substances and that all things have naturally developed as the result of this chance and accidental aggregation of bodies. We are taught that we are nothing more than highly developed and highly evolved animals, void of soul, having no accountability to God, coming from nowhere, here for no reason or purpose, making no difference how we live life, and going nowhere when it ends.

## **Unbelief**

Even people professing religious faith deny the Deity of Christ and such revelations as the miraculous birth by a virgin, His resurrection, that He is God's only begotten Son, and other matters pertaining to Him. Philosophers tell us that truth is no absolute, but relative; nothing is right or wrong except as one might think it right or wrong to himself.

One major explanation for man's personal and worldwide problems is His doubt of God. The tendency to doubt is crippling, causing one to be hesitant, fearful and suspicious. Would you cross a bridge that you doubted could sustain your weight and would likely collapse beneath you?

When we do not believe in what we are doing we cannot do it well. When we doubt that life came from the Supreme Being we

do not live it very well. Teach a boy he came from an animal and he will likely behave in similar fashion. Teach him he came from God and he will have reason to become more like God. Many have failed to anchor themselves to the stable truth of God and are like ships without rudders, being tossed to and fro; as trees being uprooted with the winds of the tempest. By doubting we become impotent and maimed, of no value to self or others. The doubting soul is starved. The inner man become lean, feeble, weak, and the outer man corrupt, vile and base. It is essential to successfully living life and being victorious over that which would destroy that we have a mighty, living, active and obedience faith in God.

### **Antidote of Doubt**

How can we counter the effect of the poison of doubt? There are several ways available to us, but let us consider just one; namely, the universe in which we live. It is boundless, yet in perfect harmony and rhythm. *"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handywork."* (Psalm 19:10). From whence comes this immensity and precision, this absolute order and punctuality of our universe? Some say it is the result of natural law. But we ask, "Who is the lawgiver?" All law must have some origin. A design must have a designer. The universe reflects the existence of a skilled maker, an intellectual power of immeasurable ability. We are compelled by observation of the sublimities and harmonies of our universe to assign their origin to an intelligent Creator.

The world in which we live is one of God's "books" to show His reality. There is the book of nature which reveals God's works. There is the Bible which is God's Word. One shows there is God and the other reveals the God that is.

When we consider man, his powers to think, love, remember and aspire, again we are forced to realize the origin of man must be higher and greater than man himself. When we meditate on history, consider the conscience, study morality, character and the nobilities exhibited in the lives of many people, the simplest, most reasonable and logical explanation is, "The builder and maker is God."

In light of the evidence available, it is not hard to believe in God. The evidence creates faith, and the Word provides the evidence (Romans 10:17). Jesus said such faith is a power that will enable us, His people, to move mountains of trial, hardship



and all other seemingly insurmountable hindrances in life that would otherwise prevent us from being acceptable to our Creator and Judge, the Almighty God of heaven.

Furthermore, we are assured of having power to do what God expects regarding living purely, reaching the lost, meeting the challenges of daily living in Christ. That power is the Biblical faith in God.

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## ***Law and Faith***

**Romans 3:31, *"Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law."***

It is important to understand the context of the passage. The word "*faith*" means the faith or religion from heaven of which Jesus Christ is the founder. The word "*law*" refers to the law of Moses, as it is so often used throughout the book of Romans. A great portion of the book of Romans is a presentation of the contrast between the law of Moses and the faith of Jesus Christ.

Moses' law was a law of man's good works. Salvation was actually impossible under this law because no person can live perfectly. Salvation that is based on man's merit and his own righteousness will never be achieved. This is because it is not in man to always be able to do all that he ought to do, or refrain from every transgression. In contrast to that, salvation under the faith of Christ is based and founded on the goodness and Deity of Jesus Christ. Therefore, salvation is apart from the law of Moses but is enjoyed by and through the faith of Christ. Romans 3:28, *"Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."* Galatians 2:16, *"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."*

### **Not Destroyed**

Paul rightly assumed, as he was guided by the Holy Spirit, that this truth regarding the law might provoke some to think the

faith of Christ made the law of Moses without any value and was even a repudiation of Moses' law. It is true that the law was taken out of the way being nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14), and we are dead to the law, being married to another (Romans 7:1-7). But the faith of Christ did not destroy the law of Moses, nor was that ever the intention or mission of Christ (Matthew 5:17,18). The law was abolished, set aside and replaced (Ephesians 2:15). Note here that most modern versions embrace a contradiction in their rendition of Matthew 5:17, 18 and Ephesians 2:15. The faith of Christ showed all the more that the law of Moses had come from God. Galatians 3:24, *"Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith."* The purpose of the law was accomplished. The law showed that man could not be saved by his own goodness. The law defined sin and condemned sin. But it did not provide for salvation from sin. Because of the law we have before us spiritual nomenclature and terminology by which we can learn and grasp the system of salvation through Christ. The law was not sinful (Romans 7:7), but did provide a knowledge of sin (Romans 3:20). It gave people moral sensitivity and kept the Jewish nation intact for the coming of the Messiah. It provided types and shadows of the faith of Christ that was to come (Hebrews 10:1). It offers figures of the true (Hebrews 9(24)).

Rather than thinking the faith of Christ undermined and made void the law, while it did fulfill it and take it out of force, it proved the law to be from God and it served as a prime development and gradual revelation of the system of salvation through Christ. Even so, Paul stresses how salvation is by faith and not the law (Romans 3:28).

### **Not All Law**

Unfortunately, this remark by Paul has been misapplied to teach that the faith of Christ releases people not only from the law of Moses but from all law. Such would release man from all regulation and restraint. Since the principle of law shows right from wrong, this difference would no longer exist if mankind is subject to no law. He would be free to follow his own conscience, his own will, his desires, being accountable to nothing and nobody but himself.

Some have even gone so far with perverting this truth as to teach that those who depend to any extent on obedience to any

law they make void the faith of Christ. They say that this would be an attempt to be saved by works. They have taught there is a conflict, rather than a contrast, between the law and the faith. Their cry is that to contend we must submit to any law is to deny salvation by faith.

Such "reasoning" causes people to reject the necessity to obey the commands to repent, confess Christ, be baptized, live righteously or anything else the Lord has commanded. Such things, they say, have no part in being saved. This is actually an advocacy of lawlessness and permissiveness without any dire consequences.

### **Law Abides**

It is true that one cannot be saved by works of the law of Moses. It is also true one cannot be saved by works of which he can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9), or works of his own righteousness (Titus 3:5). But this does not negate the absolute necessity to perform the works of obedience that the faith of Christ requires. God's commands are law. Faith in Christ does not release one from the need to obey, but imposes upon everyone that need. There are many other laws from which the faith of Christ does not release us.

Faith does not release us from the laws of nature, sometimes called the physical laws. Who releases us from the law of gravity? Or can we place our hand on a hot stove burner and no longer expect to be burned if we have faith? Are not we still subject to the law of sowing and reaping? Whether we have knowledge of such laws, or are ignorant of them, we are subject to them and must conform to them or bear the consequences.

Faith in Christ does not release us from accountability to civil law. We are not, as Christians, privileged to disobey such laws simply because we may not like some of them. Romans 13:1-6, First Peter 2:13,14 both teach our duty to such powers. Faith in Christ makes it binding upon us to obey the laws of the land. Only in instances where the laws of the land might force us into conflict with the higher law of God shall we disobey, as did the apostles in Acts four. *"We must obey God rather than man."* Being a Christian makes a person a good and lawabiding citizen.

Faith in Christ certainly does not release us from moral law. Moses' law included moral as well as ceremonial precepts. Morality is essentially a law of doing good. The religion of Christ also contains a moral code. It is the highest, noblest, purest code

known to man. Faith in Christ does not suspend us from answering to morality. It enforces our obligation to be moral. The law of Christ enlarged and expanded on the moral teaching found under Moses. Whereas Moses forbade murder, Christ even forbade hatred. While Moses condemned adultery, the Lord even said to lust was sinful. Instead of an eye for an eye attitude toward offenders, the Lord taught love and forgiveness. Morality is more binding on a Christian than ever before in his life once he comes to Christ.

### **Christ's Law**

Faith in Christ, rather than releasing us from all law, binds us to a law that Paul called the law of faith. Romans 3:27, *"Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay, but by the law of faith."* James called it the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25). This is the same as the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus mentioned in Romans 8:2. Sin is lawlessness (First John 3:4). Where there is no law there is no transgression (Romans 4:15). The very existence of sin proves the law abides.

The law of faith is the same as the gospel of Christ, the truth that Jesus said would make us free (John 8:32). It is God's system under the authority of His Son. This system requires obedience to that law. There is no conflict between salvation by faith and salvation by obedience to the law of Christ. One is a part of the other. They are inseparable. Inasmuch as a person cannot be sinless of himself, he must rely on Christ for cleansing and the way of cleansing is revealed through the gospel. Salvation is according to Christ's spiritual law.

### **Delivered From Two Laws**

There are two laws from which we are released by the faith of Christ. One is the law of Moses. The Gentile world was never subject to it anyway since that law was only given to the Israelite nation. The second is the law of sin and death. Romans 8:2,3 *"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh."* The law of sin and death simply stated is: you sin, you spiritually die. In Christ we are free from this law. Even though we sin, we can be made spiritually alive. The wages of

sin need not be suffered (Romans 6:23). This is why His law can be called the law of liberty (James 1:25). It makes us free, as does the truth (John 8:32). Without the faith of Christ, which includes law that must be obeyed, there would be no deliverance from sin even offered to mankind.

There is eternal danger in ignoring and neglecting the law of faith. The sacrifice of Christ is the only way one can be saved (Acts 4:12). It is God's remedy of the consequences of sin. There is perfect harmony between salvation by faith and salvation by works of obedience to the law of faith. God has established a spiritual law, a rule of authority (this is what law is) by which we are saved. That is identically the same thing as "*the faith*" by which we are saved (Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:16).

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## ***Retrospection, Introspection, Prospection***

Our study is of three words. Words are simply wonderful because they are symbols of ideas and thoughts. They are tools of communication. They have meaning. With words people can be motivated to action, have their emotions aroused or calmed and comforted, possibly incited to serious thought. Words are used to convey thoughts from one mind to another. God has chosen words to convey to mankind His own mind. By words He has revealed what man needs to know, to do and to be. Our lesson centers on three words, not one of which actually appears in the text of Scripture, but all three convey a thought, an idea and a concept that one finds expressed repeatedly in Scripture by other words. These three words are well-considered at the close of a year, but consideration of them can be beneficial at any time. But they are most appropriate as we take time to do some serious thinking about ourselves and our world. These words are retrospection, introspection and prospection.

### **Looking Back at the Past**

Retrospection means to look backward and contemplate and meditate on the past. It is the process of review, looking again at what has already been done. It is not always good to look back. Israel looked back once they had left Egypt. While in Egypt they considered their existence almost unbearable. But once they were delivered, and the hardships of the wilderness confronted them, they looked back longingly to the bondage from which they escaped. They longed for the fleshpots of Egypt. Lot's wife looked back when Sodom and Gomorrah were being destroyed, evidently with some yearning to return to that which she was forced to forsake. But we know the disaster that overtook her by looking back. So all retrospection is not good.

Paul once warned brethren to *"forget the things that are behind."* (Philippians 3:13). In the past there may well be some things we would prefer to have been different. The mistakes we made may cause us to wish we had another opportunity to avoid. But Paul did not want brethren to brood, worry and fret over the past. What is done is done. To borrow trouble from yesterday can become a hindrance to the present and the future.

But there is a great value in looking back if we have the right purpose and attitude in looking back. Have not many good things happened in the past that we would do well to make happen again? Is there not much in the past that is worth imitating? The reason the study of history is so useful to us is because we can learn lessons from the past, learning from our experiences and the experiences of others. Paul told us that the things written aforetime were for our learning (Romans 15:4), and the events regarding Israel serve as examples for us (First Corinthians 10:11). The observance of the Lord's Supper has an element of looking back. It is a memorial, a remembrance of Christ and that which He did on the behalf of sinful mankind. So important is this act of retrospection that we are commanded not to forsake the assemblies (Hebrews 10:25), especially when this communion is made. The Gentile Christians were exhorted to remember what they were prior to coming to Christ, such as being alienated from God, without hope, without God, having no promise (Ephesians 2:11,12). By comparing the past when they were out of Christ with being in Christ they could be grateful. The Lord wanted the Ephesians to remember that from which they had fallen (Revelation 2:5) and return to their first love. Looking back can be a very profitable exercise. Whether it is good or bad depends on why we are looking back and what we intend to do with what we observe from the past.

As we look back over the rapidly passing weeks of the past year, what events have taken place, and what have we learned from them? What have you done for the Lord? Have you kept your promises? Are you more faithful? Have you reached the goals you set? Does looking back bring regrets? Do you see more clearly the mistakes and know better how to avoid them? Do you see sadness and trouble? Are you better fit to cope with it now that you have experienced it? Has there been real progress in your home life? What of your spiritual life and service to others? Are you made to rejoice over the successes? Let us engage in retrospection, but only for a while, because the past is gone and cannot be recalled.

### **Looking Within at the Present**

Introspection is to look within. It involves self-examination. We need to appraise and evaluate our lives. It is called, in the business world, taking inventory or counting the stock. It is to consider ourselves, not as we might have been in the past, but as we are at the present.

The present cannot be encumbered with brooding over the past. We would waste the present to even dwell too long on what might have been. All that we have is now. We must be the best we can be now. Regardless of the past, now is what really matters more. Robert Burns once wrote, "Oh would some power the giver give us, to see ourselves as others see us." We might not be too happy with what we see at times.

But we are not all that concerned how others may consider us. They may see good or they may see what they consider to be bad. But what interests us most is how God sees us. The way God sees us is the way we really are. The way others see us may just be a human judgment from outward appearances, but God looks on the heart (First Samuel 16:7). God knows the hearts of people and what we really are is what we are in the heart. This does not minimize the importance of what we say and do, but it does emphasize the importance of the inward man. God is able to know and judge the inward man. How does He see us at the present?

Introspection is a very personal matter. Nobody can self-examine for us. The very concept of self-examination means that only we can make this introspection for ourselves. But the gospel requires that we look within. "*Look to yourselves,*" (Second John 8). "*Considering thyself,*" (Galatians 6:1).

*"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith,"* (Second Corinthians 13:5). *"But let a man examine himself,"* (First Corinthians 11:28). *"And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye,"* (Matthew 7:3-5). Many have thought this passage forbids making any judgments about others. That is not so. It is teaching us to examine ourselves. If we will, we can be of greater benefit to others to also see their own faults.

Self-examination demands making a comparison. We do not measure ourselves by ourselves, for this, Paul says, is not wise (Second Corinthians 10:12). But we must look into the mirror of God's Word. We must compare ourselves with the perfect law of liberty. We must consider Jesus as the standard. We must compare what we are with what we ought to be, and what we could be. We should consider our strengths as well as our weaknesses. There are good things as well as bad things about each of us. We should look at our habits, actions, words, attitudes, deeds, plans, ambitions, priorities, values and every phase of our lives. This is more than a self-imposed psychoanalysis. It is real soul-searching. It is a serious scrutiny of our hearts as well as our lives totally.

As we look within, how different are we from a year ago, if we can remember? Are we more spiritual-minded? Are we quicker to forgive? Are we stronger in the faith? Are we more determined than ever to live for Christ and like Christ and work as laborers in His vineyard? Do we love the church more? Do we show that love? Are we studying His Word more? Are we slower to harsh criticism, gossip, but quicker with words of comfort and support? Would we be ashamed to have certain portions of our lives exposed to the whole world? What if everybody in the church had the same attitude as I do or you do? What if all acted as we are now acting in life? Would the church be better or worse? Would the world be better or worse? Engaging in introspection is not an easy task. In fact, like retrospection, there may be times when it is painful. But again, there may be those things that give us courage and comfort. Introspection demands such a stern honesty that we all may find it difficult to do the job as it ought to be done.



## **Looking Forward to the Future**

Our third word is propection. Where do we go from here? This word calls for looking into the future, not as a fortune teller or a prophet, but to consider plans, set goals, determine objectives, and generally chart our course for the days that may yet be before us. We need not only to determine our goals but to seek ways to reach them. This is called propection.

In looking ahead, looking forward, we must first realize that tomorrow may never be. This is the reason our present is so important. But to linger in the past, or dwell exclusviely on the present and possibly be satisfied with things are they are, we run the risk of retardation of our growth. One fundamental Christian principle is preparation for the future and making ready for not only what may be, but most assuredly, making ready for what inevitably will be. The reason for looking back is so we can make the future better. The reason for examining ourselves in the present is to see wherein we need to make adjustments and alterations in life, so we may know what is the right course of action for the future. Nor do we want to become onesided and become mere dreamers and planners and never do anything about our dreams and plans.

But let us learn this. To set noble goals in life is commendable, as far as it goes. But that is not enough. Many goals are not reached, not because they are out of reach, but because we do not spend sufficient time and energy in propection as to how to reach them.

What do we really want for the future? Do you want more knowledge of God's Word? There are ways to accomplish this. Do you want your home to be more what God has designed the home to be? Do you want to be more faithful in worship? Do you want to give up habits than are harmful? Do you want to control your tongue? Do you want your children to see a righteous example in your life? Do you want to be more helpful to those who are less fortunate? All these goals are admirable and are within our reach? There are ways to reach them. We may not develop rapidly the character we want to become, but we need to be about the task each day. But we need to know where we are going and why. This is what propection enables us to accomplish.

There is a hymn we sing that would seem to express what every Christian should desire for the future. It reads:

More about Jesus would I know,  
More of his grace to others show;  
More of his saving fulness see,  
More of his love who died for me.

More about Jesus let me learn,  
More of his holy will discern;  
Spirit of God my teacher be,  
Showing the things of Christ to me.

Another hymn states it this way:

I want to be more like Jesus,  
And follow him day by day.  
I want to be true and faithful,  
And every command obey.

I want to be kind and gentle,  
To those who are in distress,  
To comfort the broken hearted,  
With sweet words of tenderness.

I want to be meek and lowly,  
Like Jesus, our Friend and King.  
I want to be strong and earnest,  
And souls to the Savior bring.

More and more like Jesus  
I would ever be.  
More and more like Jesus,  
My Savior, who died for me.

What aims could a person have that would exceed these? Every individual and every congregation can subscribe to such goals. How fine it would be if we would live each day so that when we look back we can look back with pleasure and consolation. How fine if we would so plan our future that we could look forward to it. How fine if we would live today in the best possible way before God. Paul wrote, *"Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 3:13,14).

(continued on page 5)



## **A Drastic Solution**

Christians, like others, watch television. Often it is difficult to find something decent to watch. So much programming is filled with profanity, immorality, violence and filth. Now and then writing campaigns are encouraged to appeal to TV officials to clean up their programs. But let us not be naive. Most of those in charge of TV productions do not care about morals. They are only concerned with fame and fortune. Like the liquor industry, they will sell their souls, and and the souls of your children if it will line their pockets a little bit more. Most are anti-God, anti-religion, immoral and corrupt in their personal lives and consider wickedness the norm that everyone should follow.

So appealing to the TV industry to clean up TV is like asking a dog not to bark. Their nature, by habit, is to dip as low as the market will allow for their material.

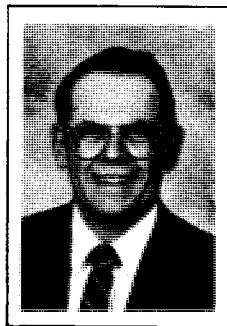
One thing we can do to prevent their filth being poured into our homes and minds. WE CAN TURN THE TELEVISION OFF. While this is not the total answer to TV trash, surely Christians can find something better to do than drink the sinful slop of television's worst.

\* \* \* \* \*

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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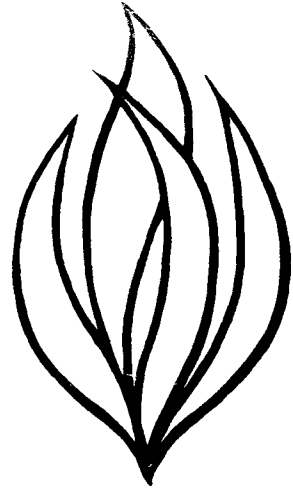


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# A Burning Fire



*"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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# ***If Christ Be Not Risen***

The reading of First Corinthians 15:12-19 is essential for this study. We urge the reader to take his own Bible and read the entire text and then return to these comments.

The First Corinthian letter dealt with many misunderstandings and problems that beset that church, including confusion about the resurrection. There were some who were denying the reality of the resurrection by contending there was no such thing, especially no resurrection for everyone. The resurrection of Christ had been preached as a vital truth of the faith among them and was believed by those who became Christians. The acceptance of Jesus as the Son of God was dependent on the factualness of His resurrection. It is part of the foundation of Christianity. To deny it is tantamount to denying the Deity of Christ, the Rock upon which the church is built.

The Sadducees denied the immortality of the soul of man, the reality of the spirit, life after this one, angels and the resurrection. Modernists continue to make such denials. Jehovah's Witnesses deny the bodily resurrection of Christ saying He was raised only in spirit and that His body is preserved somewhere as a memorial to God's love. In spite of these denials the New Testament makes it plain that the resurrection of Jesus is a plank in the platform and a theme in the message of the gospel. Romans 1:4 teaches that God declared Jesus to be His Son by the resurrection. This is not the only evidence God has provided to sustain that truth, but it is the climatic one. The Deity of Jesus Christ and the reality of the resurrection stand or fall together. If Jesus was raised, there is a resurrection. If there is no resurrection, Jesus was not raised. Our study considers the differences it would make if Jesus had remained in the tomb as Paul discusses these difference in First Corinthians chapter fifteen.

## **Preaching in Vain**

First, the preaching done by the apostles and early evangelists was in vain. Our preaching of the same message today would also be in vain. The first part of the chapter informs us we are saved by the gospel, which includes the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. If He was not raised, the gospel is false.

Surely none would contend we can be saved by a false gospel. It would not be God's power unto salvation as is affirmed in Romans chapter one, verse sixteen.

Paul and Peter show the necessity of obeying the gospel to be saved (First Thessalonians and First Peter). If the gospel is false, it would be of no benefit to obey it. Rather than man being saved "*by the foolishness of preaching*" (First Corinthians 1:21), that which the world considered foolish, all preaching would be foolishness and vain.

Furthermore, the apostles would be false witnesses inasmuch as they claimed they testified as directed by God. This would make God an accomplice in their lies.

### **Faith Vain**

Second, not only would the preaching be empty, vain and useless, the faith of those who believed it was also vain. Their faith would be no more than a pathetic delusion, beautiful to consider but worthless. We are saved by faith. But to trust in a Lord that was no more than just another man would be to lean on a broken reed.

The resurrection was cited by Jesus as a sign to prove He is the Messiah and Savior of man. It is the sign of the prophet Jonas (Matthew 12:39,40). If there is no resurrection, there is no sign and there is no proof that He is what He claimed to be. If he did not come forth from the tomb as even He prophesied, the entire Christian system and everything about it is nothing more than another human philosophy without authority, not from heaven and no better than anything else somebody may invent. This is a serious matter.

### **Still in Sin**

Third, Paul told these brethren, "*Ye are yet in your sins.*" Few statements of Scripture are more shattering than this possible conclusion. Sin condemns man, separating him from God. Sin transgresses God's law (First John 3:4). It defiles and prevents fellowship with God, dooming man into an eternal punishment. No sin or unclean thing can enter heaven into the presence of God. The tragedy is enlarged by the fact that we all sin (Romans 3:23).

The only way known to secure remission of sin is by believing and obeying the Lord. Sin must be blotted out, forgiven



(Romans 4:7,8). Christ came to the earth, lived, died, was buried and rose again to provide the way of remission. This is God's part in God's plan to save man. If the resurrection is false there is no provision for forgiveness. Not only have those who have followed God's plan been deceived, they remain in sin and there is no way for mankind by which he can ever be delivered from the guilt and wages of sin. It is a gloomy, somber, desperate, pessimistic, frightening and hopeless thought, "*Ye are yet in your sins.*"

### **Dead Have Perished**

Fourth, those who lived and died faithful to Christ have gained nothing, but have only perished. The church in Thessalonica had misunderstandings about the resurrection and the return of Christ. They were concerned about those who died in Christ before His return. Paul dispells their misgivings in First Thessalonians 4:13-18. They did not die without hope, but in hope. Revelation 14:13, "*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord...*" is valid. Hope is founded on the resurrection.

Shall we agree to be true that life properly lived is of no more benefit than life lived in wickedness? Have those who suffered in being godly done it all for nothing? Have they simply ceased to exist and labored valiantly for no eternal reason? Could there be any sense of justice to treat wickedness and righteousness alike?

### **No Hope**

Fifth, if there is no resurrection, even we ourselves who profess Christ are of all men most miserable and to be pitied. If our hope extends only to the edge of the grave and ends with physical death then life is one gigantic hoax. All of our determination to live righteously, the suffering for the cause of Christ, disappointments, deprivations, patient endurance is no more than a misguided and misspent life. It has accomplished nothing that shall last.

We firmly believe that living life as a Christian is the best way to live even if there was no life beyond the grave. But much of the appeal and purpose of life and being a Christian would be destroyed if there is no resurrection.

Paul showed the differences it would make if Christ had not come forth and there is no resurrection: He is not the Son of God; the preaching of the gospel is in vain; believing the gospel

is also vain; guilt of sins remains and there is no hope; the dead faithful have only perished and their efforts had just as soon not have been made; and those still living in Christ are a deluded and pitiable lot of deceived people.

### **But He Arose**

But after showing these differences if Jesus had failed to come forth, Paul declared in verse twenty, *"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept."*

With this declaration he is echoing what was announced shortly after the Lord arose. Matthew 28:5,6, *"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."* Paul affirms with complete and unqualified confidence that none of the dire differences he has mentioned are real: Christ is the Son of God. His preaching and the preaching of Him is not in vain nor was faith vain. Christians are not yet in sin and neither have those who have died faithful in the Lord perished. Rather than being pitiable, the believer is of all men most blessed.

By His resurrection Jesus became the firstfruits, the pledge, the guarantee and expectaion of the resurrection of all. All shall be raised, both the righteous and unrighteous (John 5:28,29). Who is so dead of spirit and dull of conscience that His resurrection does not motivate and thrill our hearts to seek His way in life?

### **Who Will Benefit?**

As glorious and marvelous as was His resurrection, and as awesome the resurrection of all shall be, as far as one's salvation is concerned, Jesus had just as soon remained in the tomb except one comes to Christ to receive the nenefits of His resurrection. We do not want to be rasied unto damnation, but unto life. Only in Christ is this possible. Little wonder the invitation of the Lord should be heard and heeded with utmost respect and positive response.

† † † † †

# **Obedience to God**

Hebrews 5:8,9, *"Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered, and being made perfect, he became the author of salvation unto all them that obey him."*

First Samuel 15:22, *"And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."*

If we could summarize with one word the sum total of man's duty to the Lord the major word would likely be "obedience." Solomon said, *"Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man."* (Ecclesiastes 12:13). In this lesson we want to investigate what it means to obey God. The principles of obedience to God have been the same in every dispensation even though the specific commandments have varied. The principles of obedience for Abraham, Noah, David, Joshua, people on Pentecost, the Ethiopian and for us have been the same. We will not deal so much with specific commandments but with principles.

First, turn to the dictionary to see what is said of obedience. It means to execute the commands of, carry out what is directed, to do as directed or commanded. When an officer in the army gives an order to a soldier and that soldier does what he is told to do we say he has obeyed the command of the officer. When a father gives certain instructions to his son and the son does what the father has directed we say he has obeyed the father.

## **Willing to Obey**

But there is a necessary difference between obeying directions given by an officer or a parent and rendering acceptable obedience to God. The difference is very significant. For instance, if the father told his son to mow the lawn, the son may well get the mower and mow the lawn, but he may not have done it willingly. He may have fussed and pouted all the while he was mowing. He mowed the lawn but his heart was not in it. The soldier may well have done as the officer commanded but if he had his way he would not have done it. He did not want to please the officer but felt he had to do what he was told

nonetheless. But he did not do what he did with a willing heart.

But obedience to God, an obedience that is pleasing to God, must be done with the right motive and from the heart. The attitude as well as the action must be in conformity with His will. This leads us to the first of four qualities of obedience to God that we wish to observe.

### **From the Heart**

One must obey God from the heart, doing what he does willingly. People talk about "heart-felt" religion, often meaning something emotional. But the "heart-felt" religion of the Bible is when the heart or mind of man obeys God sincerely and voluntarily. True New Testament Christianity springs from the heart or it is not true New Testament Christianity. Romans 6:16,17, *"Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine delivered you."*

### **Not Forced**

Genuine obedience to God cannot be forced. It must come from within before it is real. It may even be painful at times to obey, but still what we do must be done willingly. Sometimes it may be painful to follow the directions of the doctor, but we do what he tells us willingly because we know it is what must be done. It is not always easy to say, "I was wrong; I am sorry; I must change." It is not always easy to be shunned by former friends and even family in order to stand with God, but we must do so sincerely and willingly if that be required of us. God wants my heart. He does not really possess my life until He has the heart, mind and will.

### **Right Motives**

Closely related to that point, obedience to God must come from the right motive. We may do the right act, the very outward act the Lord requires, and still fall short of properly obeying Him. To obey men may be accomplished by just doing the right act, like mowing the lawn regardless of attitude. But our motive and attitude is important in obedience to God.

Action and attitude are part of Christianity. For example, one man may hit your head with his elbow and your head hurts. But it was an accident. He did not intend to do it. Another may hit your head with his elbow, but did it deliberately. The first man apologizes while the second is glad he did what he did. The head is hit and hurts both times. But who cannot see the difference between these two episodes? The difference is the motive behind the deed.

Again, two men may be on trial for taking another life. One is set free while the other goes to the gas chamber. What is the difference? One did what he did because of an unavoidable accident, or possibly through self defense. The other acted from malice, animosity and premeditated hatred. Motive made the difference. We all can see the distinction.

### **Motive and Deed**

We can do wrong in action while the heart or motive is pure and right. We can do right in action even with an evil and sinister motive. God knows the heart and motive as well as the action. Both count with Him.

Simon, the former sorcerer of Acts eight, wanted to buy the apostolic power. Peter said his heart was not right. The power he wanted was not evil, but his motive made him impure. Ananias and his wife gave liberally to the Lord, but their motive was evil which prompted them to lie about what they had given. Saul gave David Michal for David's wife, but he hoped she would be a snare unto him. The action seemed noble and generous, but the motive was evil. Peter drew his sword to protect Christ. His action was out of place and Christ rebuked him. But who can doubt the sincerity of motive at that point in the life of the apostle?

Therefore, to obey God our intent and purpose, the motive behind the deed, must be considered. It matters with God.

### **Right Understanding**

Again, we cannot obey God without a certain amount of correct information. Christianity is a taught religion (John 6:44,45; Matthew 28:18-20). We cannot obey right when we have been taught wrong. Doing what we do to obey God may be a good motive, but unless that which we do is what God

wants done, and we do what we do with understanding, it is not obedience as the Bible requires.

In Acts eighteen Apollos came to Ephesus teaching John's baptism which was a part of the preparatory work for the coming of Christ. What Apollos did not then know was that John's baptism was no longer valid because the Lord had come. Those who did what Apollos was telling them to do had to be baptized again because they could not obey right when they had faulty information and their actions were founded on error, not truth. When people are baptized today they may even obey the right manner, that is, be immersed. But they must have the correct information concerning their actions in order to obey from the heart, the seat of understanding. One cannot be taught that he is saved before baptism and obey the New Testament command because the New Testament teaches baptism is necessary to salvation. One cannot be baptized just to join some denomination because the Bible never teaches about any denomination, never authorizes the existence of any denomination in the past, present or future, let alone that one is baptized to join one of them. The action may outwardly appear good, but the understanding makes the action of no value.

### **Right Action**

But obedience obviously demands the actual doing what God says must be done. Even with the correct information, proper motive and a willingness to obey, obedience must include the actual doing what is commanded.

One illustration of doing what is commanded is when the blind man went to the pool of Siloam and washed his eyes as Jesus directed (John 9). He went willingly, with the right motive, the right information, and he acted as he was directed. That man obeyed and went his way seeing.

The Jews on Pentecost, after hearing Peter present the irrefutable evidence that Jesus was both Lord and Christ, and after asking what they must do to be saved, being willing to obey and having received proper information, three thousand of them having the right motive, did what they were commanded to do; namely, repent and be baptized. They were blessed with forgiveness of sins and were obedient.

These four principles of obedience have always been involved. We must obey God to be saved. Christ will save, but only those who obey Him. We cannot reject His commands and

expect His rewards. *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* (John 14:15). Obedience means doing the right thing, with proper understanding, for the right motive, the right way and the heart converted submissively to the will of God.

† † † † †

## ***Five Exhortations to Christians - Part One***

First Corinthians was written to meet pressing problems in that congregation. They suffered from division, immorality, an abuse of the Lord's Supper, holdover conduct characteristic of heathenism, a lack of brotherliness, irreverence, confusion about cardinal points in the doctrine of Christ and many other matters of sinful conduct and ignorance. These were trying times for the people of God in Corinth. Pressures were against them from within and without and they were not responding to them as they ought. The Holy Spirit through Paul sent words of rebuke, correction and instruction alongside sentiments of admonition and encouragement. For these Christians to continue as they were would mean the loss of their souls because God does not accept sin and error of people even when they are His children.

The church has never seen an age when it did not face problems. The church faces many threats and dangers in our time. The guidance that Deity gave the churches in New Testament times how to be faithful is relevant and necessary for churches today. In this lesson we shall consider four of five exhortations to Christians and study the fifth in a second lesson as presented to us in First Corinthians 16:13,14.

*"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity."*

### **Watch**

Paul advised his brethren as a commander would his troops or a sentry on duty. He was mindful of the war between the forces of good and evil and how Christians, as God's soliders in His army, must be alert, on guard, ready, prepared, attentive and

always taking heed to the dangers to the soul thrust upon him from Satan.

Our enemy is the devil (First Peter 5:8). Therefore, the devil, known as the Tempter (First Corinthians 7:5; First Thessalonians 3:5; Matthew 4:1-11, makes it essential for Christians to be alert. Mark 14:38, *"Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation."*

We must be on guard against deception. *"Take heed lest any man deceive you."* After citing the Israelites as examples of what not to imitate, Paul wrote, *"Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."* (First Corinthians 10:12). We are urged by the Christ to be watchful in view of His return (Mark 13:32,33). We endanger our souls if we are careless, spiritually asleep, indifferent toward sin, negligent of our growth in Christ, and thereby make ourselves subjects to be easily overcome by the enemy.

Ezekiel 33:1-9 is a classic and oft-quoted passage of Scripture that emphasizes the need of alert watchfulness, not only for the watchman's sake, but for the sake of others. There will be no preservation of our spiritual welfare if we ignore such teaching.

## **Stand**

The faith refers to the religion of which Jesus Christ is the author and founder. It is the entire Christian system, including morals, observances, work, worship, standards, priorities, goals, ideals, purposes in life, as well as other other points of doctrine in the revelation of the doctrine of Christ.

First Corinthians 15:58, *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."* Like a mighty tree with roots running deep will hold firm against the strongest of adverse winds, like the Rock of Gibraltar that does not forsake its position, like the surging sea-going vessl that plows through stormy waves though beaten on every side but remains on course, ever moving toward its destination of the harbor of safety, so must we be as we move toward the eternal safety of heaven.

Paul admonishes faithfulness which simply means to keep on keeping on. Both the old and young in Christ must learn to resist the currents of sin and not allow themselves to be tossed to and fro. This can be accomplished only by establishing firm convictions grounded upon *"thus saith the Lord."* It demands



strong resolutions and determination to stand faithful in Christ against whatever may present itself to lead us astray whether that influence comes from within the ranks of the church or from any other source of whatever magnitude.

We must learn to say "NO" to the ways of the sinful world (Romans 12:1,2). We must say "YES" to the duties and obligations the Christian assumes when he comes from the waters of baptism. This means denying self, putting God first, faithfulness to and in His church (Matthew 6:33; 16:24; Luke 9:23-26). Nothing is more important.

### **Similar, but Different**

There is a similarity between steadfastness and stubbornness. The first is commendable and the second is contemptible. Both give the impression of standing firm. But steadfastness is standing firm in the way of the Lord while stubbornness is standing firm in your own will. It is opposite of denying self.

One person standing firm in righteousness encourages others to also stand firm. Consider the lives of Moses, Joshua, David and Paul. One student being faithful under temptation will lead other students to be faithful. One member of the family being immovable in Christ will lead the entire family that direction. One congregation unwilling to bend before the pressures to conform to digression and liberalism may well be just what other congregations need to see in order to be encouraged to do the same thing and remain faithful.

Every Christian should strive to be a spiritual Stonewall Jackson, the great warrior of the Confederacy, who in three years of warfare never suffered a defeat in battle even though usually outnumbered in both men and weapons. In the first conflict at Bull Run, May, 1861, as his troops were about to break and run, Jackson rode his horse into the heat of battle and refused to give ground. He stood like a stone wall. His soldiers saw him and rallied, turning the tide of battle in their favor. What a great influence for good is any Christian who stands for truth and right even in the midst of the hordes of error!

### **Behave**

This admonition has to do with our conduct. Paul urges that his brethren "*quit,*" or behave, like mature people, in a manly fashion, being noble in conduct. Many problems are caused and

agitated by petty and childish behavior. Paul teaches Christians, as soldiers under fire, to be grave rather than cowardly; mature and manly rather than weak and compromising. If there is something the Lord's church of our day sorely needs among preachers, elders and members generally, it is the maturity not to compromise with error.

Paul knew from personal experience the severity of persecution (Second Corinthians 11:22ff). He knew the hardship imposed by problems and pressures. He cautioned against discouragements and disappointments. He stressed that his brethren develop a quality of boldness, courage and intelligence to act like spiritually mature people.

Some brethren have to constantly be pampered, petted and begged to do what they ought. They pout and throw their tantrums if they do not get their way. They put their grievances on their shoulders just daring anyone to touch them. Such things are marks of immaturity unbecoming a child of God, a source of strife among brethren and the fuel that ignites into blazing destruction. Paul urged these Christians in Corinth to face life head-on, even in times of stress, be not fearful, whimpering and sullen, but conduct themselves in a manly fashion that should characterize a follower of Christ.

## **Strength**

Without spiritual strength we cannot accomplish the first three admonitions. To be strong is something more easily said than attained. Strength in the Lord does not come by accident nor by some kind of chance operation. Many remain weak throughout life because they do not exert themselves properly in doing what is essential to gain the strength needed.

Just as we cannot grow physically without proper food, activity and care, it is also true that we cannot grow spiritually without proper nourishment and spiritual exercise. The food for the soul is the Word of God. The activity needed is the service and work that God has commissioned and authorized for the church. Those who are seldom in attendance at worship, who consider the services something optional, who are not regular students of the Word, who do not make themselves available for the work to be done, whose lives are inconsistent with their professed faith, soon become spiritually emaciated. Growing in strength is not an optional matter. It is command from Deity (Second Peter 3:18). He expects us to do what He says. God

commands it and has informed us how we are to grow. To not grow is disobedience. Therefore, to refuse to do those things necessary for growth is defiance against God. How could it be considered any other way?

Growth comes gradually, but it does come when the efforts are made. Nothing is asked of us by our Lord that we cannot do. God has provided the food, and brethren are willing to help each other. Parents must grow for their own sake, the sake of their children, the sake of the church and for the sake of righteousness in the world. Leaders must be strong. How can the strong bear the burdens of the weak if there are not strong ones (Galatians 6:2)?

Consider these four admonitions in a serious and sincere way and then proceed to study the fifth one that the next lesson presents; an admonition that is a direction and encouragement to faithfulness and Christlikeless that God desires in each one of His children.

† † † † †

## ***Five Exhortations to Christians - Part Two***

We begin this second part of this lesson with a brief review of the major points made in the first. The epistles to the Corinthians were written to deal with a number of spiritual problems that had arisen in the congregation. The brethren faced persecution and opposition from without as well as their problems among themselves. To enable the church to properly meet and respond to this crisis Paul wrote words of inspired instruction how to deal with all of these matters. But he also included words of encouragement and admonition to equip the brethren to successfully weather the storms before them.

Our first lesson considered the first four of five exhortations of First Corinthians 16: 13,14. They were (1) watch, (2) be faithful or steadfast, (3) behave in a mature manner, and (4) be strong. Now we turn our attention to the last exhortation.

*"Let all your things be done with charity."* This is somewhat of an umbrella exhortation without which the first four could not

be accomplished. It answers the question as to why the first four ought to be accomplished. Watchfulness is a duty, but it should be motivated by a love for God, truth and the souls of fellowmen. Standing fast is sometimes confused with stubbornness. But the distinction between them is whose will is followed and why. The love one has in his or her heart for what God has decreed to be right is the motive behind steadfastness. Manly behavior is inseparable from love. We must do whatever we have to do to become strong. But being strong spiritually necessitates the possession and practice of love. The word "*charity*" expresses the idea of love in action. The first four qualities are beneficial only if clothed in love.

First Corinthians thirteen is often called the "love chapter" of the Bible because the virtues of love are cataloged for us. It certainly is not the only chapter where this Christlike trait is emphasized. Written to the church in an age when miracles were still being performed for the confirmation of the gospel, love is said to be greater than the power to speak in tongues, or languages that have not been naturally learned. The gift of prophecy, the power to make known the will of God, is of great value. Yet, love is even greater. Miraculous knowledge, given to assist God's early church to do what they otherwise could not do in spreading the gospel, is also surpassed in greatness by love. Such faith as to be able to move mountains, surmount all difficulties, was an invaluable asset to the cause of Christ. But even that pales when compared to the virtue of love. Paul mentioned good works and sacrifices that are offered before God. But without love all these things become nothing more than the noise of tinkling cymbals and the clanging of brass. These gifts, without love, would prove to be without profit.

### **Why Love is Superior**

Why is love considered superior to these things that cannot be counted as nothing? It is because the motive and manner of what we do is of such importance to God. Love is more lasting (verse 8). It shall never fail. These gifts would continue until the completed revelation of the will of God was fully made known. But they served a temporary function involving revelation and confirmation. Then they would be taken away, their purpose being accomplished. But not so with love. Love was not only needful when Paul wrote Corinth but would ever be needful. The permanence of love makes love greater than other qualities

and the gifts with which it is compared in First Corinthians thirteen and other passages.

Paul teaches that love causes a person to be longsuffering, patient and enduring. Love is what makes one kind, considerate, gentle and affectionate. Those who love hold no envy or jealousy in the heart. Envy is often the parent to hate and other deeds of wickedness.

Those possessing the virtue of love do not vaunt themselves, thrust themselves forward above others, seek the highest seats for their own glory nor display their egotism. Rather they possess a genuine humility with a willingness to let others receive the praise. Closely akin to this quality is not being puffed up with inflated opinions of oneself. Those who seek the welfare of others, which is the real definition of love, never seek their own advancement at the expense of the welfare of others. As noticeable as any malady in the church of our time are those who seek prominence and say and do whatever is necessary to attain it. Those who love have the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:1-8) and do not thirst for recognition and praise of men.

### **More Traits of Love**

Love guides a person in his behavior so he will not act haughtily. He will give due honor and respect to worthy ones around him. It is a sorry quality to see people, even some who profess to be followers of Christ, attempting to promote themselves by degrading others. It has become a practice of late for some to advance their own acceptance by denouncing those who contend for sound doctrine. But love does not allow one to "look down his snooty nose" at anybody nor consider oneself superior due to his finances, education or self-proclaimed righteousness. Is it not inconsistent to look down on others that you consider to lack the high degree of love that you assign to yourself? What is that about the legs of the lame being unequal?

A person whose heart is filled with love is not easily provoked into doing what is wrong. Anger is controlled. Exasperation is never allowed to go unchecked. He realizes there are some things that cannot be overcome but must be endured. A heart of love is not overly hasty, excitable and spontaneously passionate, but rather is serious and calm, looking soberly at all things.

Another goodness of love causes one to seek the good in everything where it is possible. It may not always be found. But love will cause one to put the best construction on the acts of

others without impugning motives, but not allowed to think evil of others when there is no cause or justification for doing so. A person of love is made to rejoice when righteousness is in evidence just as he grieves over unrighteousness. He is never glad in any wrongdoing of himself or others.

Other qualities of love include bearing all things, covering evil rather than gloating over it, believing all the good he can learn, hoping for the best in everything, suffering and enduring evil rather than manifesting a spirit of vengeance and retaliation. In all these ways the virtue of love is superior to even miraculous powers. At the same time, we must never confuse love with toleration of sin and making light to error.

We must take note how the description of love in First Corinthians thirteen emphasizes the positive and constructive characteristics. Love builds rather than primarily seeking to destroy. Even when love for truth necessitates destruction of error it is because of the desire to build on truth and not destroy those in error but the error some hold. As Paul concluded that "love chapter" he mentioned faith, hope and love and declared that love is even the greater of the three.

### **Throughout the Faith**

Indeed, love is a prominent and dominant theme and stream that flows in full force in the faith of Jesus Christ. There are many, many passages where the Master and those inspired to teach in His name have stressed this basic asset to our spiritual welfare. Without taking the space to write all such passages down, let us close by urging each reader to spend some time in serious study, taking your concordance and tracing the many passages on love, noting their context and the actions surrounding genuine love. Love motivates action and determines the manner of conduct Paul says should govern and control everything we do. This is a quality that is like Deity (First John 4:8,16). It is a virtue that will equip us to remain faithful through any and all difficulties we may encounter in living the quality of life God expects of each Christian.

### **What Love Demands**

But never let us forget that there is no such thing as genuine love approved before God without obedience to His commandments. *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* (John

14:15). *“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.”* (First John 5:3). It is a gross error to look upon love as the totality of being faithful to God unless you include and understand that love must embrace obedience. The claim of love where there is not obedience is a hollow and vain claim. We hear many today speak fluently and repeatedly of love but they fail to show love for the truth or respect the need to obey the will of God. They can speak so disparagingly of those who do teach the necessity to obey in order for love to be genuine. The idea that love is everything is false. Love, however, is to be behind everything and included in everything. This is the major thrust of the fifth of these five admonitions Paul gave his first century brethren and which the Holy Spirit through the Word continues to deliver to each Christian today.

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## ***Social Drinking***

We realize that the world at large does not accept the truth that will be presented in this lesson. We also realize that there be many who profess to be Christians who do not believe it either. But we also realize that neither the world nor the members of the church have to agree with something in order for it to be the truth. In fact, it is often the case that the majority attitude can be held suspect because the majority has so often been wrong down through the ages.

We shall present the truth of God regarding the “social drinking” of alcoholic beverages. It is certainly a study that is needed in our time because so many are drinkers and there is such a compromised attitude everywhere on this and just about everything else related to it. Even some who do not wish to actively promote the drinking of such beverages are unwilling to stand against this evil.

The young need the wisdom of God in this matter but more often than not they hear and see nothing but the promotion of drinking. Non-Christians need to know what God expects. Regrettably, many who have been baptized need to demonstrate more respect for the truth than they have done thus far.

We shall not attempt to compel anyone to take a stand on this vital issue without the foundation of God’s Word being that

upon which we stand. You would think that those who say they love the Lord would be persuaded by the Biblical evidence. In many cases this is the happy circumstance. But in many others, even what God's Word teaches makes little to no impression. Nonetheless, we shall make it so plain that none can misunderstand, and can know if they continue to defy God's Word that they do so to the damnation of the soul.

### **By Its Fruits**

We can know a thing by its fruits, that is, the results produced by it. A good tree will produce good fruit and an evil tree will produce evil fruit (Matthew 7:16,20). *"Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."* This is true whether it be men or the practices of men. The evils brought upon mankind by the consumption of alcoholic beverages are so numerous, obvious, hideous, that no honest person can deny its destructiveness. Of course, here is part of the problem; namely, so many are defiantly dishonest. Truth is not what they want. They want what suits them and not what pleases God. So the evidence of all the havoc of the alcoholic beverage makes no difference to many. But should it not make some difference to those who say they love God?

We shall not bore each other by reviewing the multitude of reliable statistics of the ruin caused by drinking. We can total the millions of dollars spent, the millions of alcoholics, the twisted minds, the diseased bodies, the crime, divorces, broken homes, destroyed property, lost lives, loss of manpower from jobs, accidents, poverty, pain, waste. Maybe we can total the gallons consumed. But who can measure the heartbreak, pain, lack of food, shelter and clothing, both of adults and innocent children. How do you measure the fear, beatings, insecurity, shame, humiliation and regret? A cold statistical chart can never reflect the human suffering that has been brought upon the human family because of the consumption of alcoholic beverages. There is no way for a honest person to show that first benefit to mankind in drinking alcoholic beverages. There has never been shown one good thing to come from it, ever, anywhere.

### **Not Just Alcohol**

Let us be clear what we are considering. We are not simply talking about alcohol. We are not talking about the use of



medicine or preservatives in food. We are talking about drinking alcohol as a beverage. While some may frown on what they call too much drinking, we are talking about drinking it at all. We are talking about the social drinking that has become so commonplace and socially accepted. Everywhere you turn, right and left, on nearly every television program, repeated commercials, billboards, that which is called the cocktail parties, the beer on the way home from work, the visit to the local bar, the consumption of beer, whiskey, brandy, wines, etc., the social drink is before us. There are some who would agree that getting drunk to the extent of totally losing control is wrong. But they will condone a limited amount of drinking, failing to realize their inconsistency and continuing disrespect for the truth.

### **Matter of Degree**

What we need to understand is that drunkenness is condemned. But we also must understand that drunkenness is a matter of degree. This is not only proven from Scriptures but has been repeatedly proven by medical science. The state has declared a certain alcoholic content in the blood to be legally drunk. But that is an arbitrarily determined figure and the amount is not the same in every state. One state says you are drunk with a certain per cent of alcohol in the blood while another state may say some other per cent. Can one drink whiskey in a place and be drunk, but step across an artificial boundary and all of the sudden not be drunk? Legally this may be done. But he is still in the same condition both places. The fact is, when one drinks he becomes drunk to some degree, regardless of how much he has consumed. If five drinks make one so drunk he cannot function at all, one drink certainly impairs him to some degree. If five drinks will make one "dog drunk, sot drunk," one drink makes him drunk to some degree. It is drunkenness in both cases. One is simply more incapacitated than another. Even with one drink the heart, lungs, blood, muscles, reflexes, mental power and stomach are adversely affected. The more one consumes the greater and more pronounced the effects, certainly. The more consumed the greater the problem. But the fact remains that drunkenness is existent in every case, one drink, ten drinks, fifty drinks, and drunkenness is that which the Bible condemns (Galatians 5:21). How many passages do you need before you accept God's truth?

You cannot dismiss this and be honest with the truth. You may dismiss it, but that does not change the truthfulness of it. You are just denying the truth. If you are of that disposition, you are on your way to hell anyway.

We have heard the so-called Christian argue that some drinking is not wrong. but drinking too much becomes wrong. He tries to parallel it with eating food. Some food is all right, but gluttony is wrong. That is right about food. But the two are not parallel. Some say getting drunk is no worse than overeating. But what does that prove except both are wrong? Gluttony does not make drunkenness any less sinful. But food is essential to life. Alcoholic beverages are not. Consuming food in moderation is necessary and acceptable, but drunkenness is not acceptable in any degree. Drunkenness is sinful. How many times must this be emphasized for it to sink in? You cannot do wrong in moderation.

### **Temperance**

To be temperate, or moderate, means to exercise self-control. Christians exercise self-control by doing what is right and abstaining from what is wrong. One cannot lie in moderation. One cannot steal just a little bit and it be acceptable. One cannot commit adultery now and then and God be pleased. Doing wrong is always sinful. So it is with drinking alcoholic beverages. Drunkenness is wrong and is a matter of degree. First Peter 4:4 speaks of the *"excess of riot."* This is not talking about rioting excessively. It means rioting is excessive, out-of-bounds, off-limits. How much riot can one create and still be pleasing to God? He can create no riot at all because rioting is excessive. There is an excess that is called rioting. The same passage talks about the excess of wine. How much wine is excessive? The drinking of wine is excess regardless of the amount. We are aware that many will dismiss this, but they cannot change it. To such people we can only say you are flying defiantly into the face of reality and God when you deny His Word. But you will pay for your sins. The trouble is that so many others will probably suffer because of you.

A person that steals once only steals moderately in comparison with a person who steals fifty times. But in either case, he sins. One may not drink until he cannot walk or loses consciousness or falls flat on his face. But you are beyond God's limits with that first drink. Moderation means doing what is right

moderately and temperately and abstaining from doing wrong altogether.

### ***“Banqueting”***

In First Peter 4:3 we find the word *“banqueting.”* That word means taking strong drink in small amounts. It does not mean drinking until you drop. It means taking strong drink in small amounts. One may do this until he drops, but it means taking strong drink in small amounts. Is that not what happens at cocktail parties? Is that not what one does when he drinks beer? Can you think of how one can drink alcoholic beverages any other way than by taking it in small amounts? He may continue to take small amounts until he has taken a large amount, but he does a little at a time. This is exactly what the Scriptures say was characteristic of the sinful lives of people who walk not according to the ways of God. We might add here that the phrase *“excess of wine”* literally means *“winetaking.”* No amount is specified or indicated. Winetaking is called excess. Do you accept what God’s Word says or are you still determined to do whatever suits you? This whole matter is simply a matter of submission to the will of God or not. Those who drink defy God. That is all there is to it. It is that simple.

### **Why Want to Defend It?**

Before we get down to even stronger evidence, let me ask, “Why would a Christian who professes to imitate Christ want to defend the practice of drinking alcoholic beverages anyway?” Many do try to justify it. We shall consider these attempts in a moment. But why would one even want to do that? When the harm done by drinking is so prevalent and obvious, what makes anyone want to defend it? Obviously, those who manufacture, distribute, sell and consume the stuff do not care about much else except their indulgence, pocketbooks and appetites. God and their fellowman mean nothing to them. Truly, they could care less. They want money and that is the main reason the industry flourishes. There is no honest effort in the government to do anything substantial about the number one drug problem in America. There is no intention of curtailing the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Most of those in charge are drinkers and getting money and political support from the industry is the number one priority.

We suggest you do some research on your own as we have. Visit the mental hospitals and see those whose minds have been ruined by the drink, and then see if you come away advocating the “innocent” use of it. Remember that every alcoholic began with a social drink. Every one of them! They were not deranged and diseased before they contaminated their bodies and minds by drinking. They became that way. Look at them and then give the beer commercials a standing ovation! Go to the tavern and see the faces of the depraved, debauched people. Talk to those behind the bars of jail cells who committed crimes while under the influence of alcohol and then see if you think well of it. Try to comfort that family whose child has been crushed by an automobile driven by some drunk and see if you still think it is just an innocent pastime and recreation. See the poverty that the drunk and his family suffer, if the family is even still intact. Talk to the jobless who cannot hold a job because he drinks. Look at the battered children and wives who have been knocked about by some drunken husband and father. Go to the emergency rooms of your local hospital and see the bloody bodies brought in night after night because somebody had to have their drinks. See that person who has sold his or her virtue while under the influence of alcohol. Look at the blurry eyes and scarred bodies of the victims of alcohol. We challenge you to do a little of this kind of investigation and see if you can go home, open your refrigerator door and drink your beer and think nothing is wrong with it. When you drink you are voting for such tragedies as mentioned to continue. You are giving your influence in that direction. There is no more sure hypocrite on God’s earth than the so-called Christian who condones drinking. If you will do some personal research, and can still come away saying there is nothing wrong with it, knowing that it all begins with the social drink, the little drink, the first drink, then you have sunk to such a low moral level of thinking that probably only hell itself can give you what you deserve.

### **Influence**

Social drinking is wrong because of the influence of it. God calls the strong drink an adder (Proverbs 23:32). An adder is a very poisonous reptile. Its venom is deadly. Would you place such a creature as that in your refrigerator? Would you have it on your table? Would you walk around with it in your hand? Would you let it be around your children? Would you give it to

your neighbor? If you would you are a bigger fool than we know how to handle. Are you not aware of God's condemnation on those who would cause another to stumble? Does that make any difference with you? We shall give account for our influence just like everything else of our lives. We are to let our light shine to the glory of God, not to the damnation of others. Paul warned to abstain from the appearance of evil. No man lives without influencing those around him. How many young people have been led to the devil's slaughter under the influence of alcohol because they first began drinking because their very own parents set the example? We hear fools say, "Learn to take your liquor. Learn when you have had enough." You have had too much to have that first drink. Nothing good ever comes from it. It is the way of eternal damnation and a miserable existence on earth.

But some religious people stupidly, ignorantly, defiantly and blasphemously try to justify it. They just as soon try to prove stealing is right by teaching the parable of the Good Samaritan. There is not that first portion of evidence in the Bible to justify social drinking or the consumption of alcoholic beverages. The only thing we read about it is a proper use of alcohol for medicinal purposes, not as a beverage.

### **What Jesus Made**

But did not Jesus make wine and serve to others? Jesus made wine. But what he made was the Greek word "oinos." That word is used to refer to both fermented and unfermented wine. There is no way to cite what Jesus made and prove He made strong drink. Christ lived perfectly under the old law. The law forbade giving your neighbor strong drink (Habakkuk 2:15). Are we to think Jesus violated that teaching? Those who were at the wedding feast were not drinking intoxicating beverages. They were able to discern taste even after their supply was exhausted. This is not the case with the consumption of intoxicating wine. What they had was called "good wine," which means void of spirits. It was not a fermented wine. To try to tie Jesus, the Son of God, with a social drinking event is blasphemy of the most sordid kind. It was not so and no living person can prove otherwise. Wine is not always fermented. It is also the pure juice of the grape. Even grapes while still on the vine are called wine in the Bible. Certainly that is not intoxicating in that state.

### **What Timothy Took**

But Paul told Timothy to take wine for the stomach's sake. Correct! If you are positive you have the same trouble Timothy had, you ought to drink exactly what Paul advised. But be sure you know what he had and what he drank. No, this does not justify the beer, whiskey, brandied wines and liquors that people consume today. Again, what Paul told Timothy to take was "oinos" which does not necessarily mean something intoxicating or a strong drink. Even if it was of that nature, this is a case of taking alcohol as medicine, not a social drink. There is no case for alcoholic beverages here.

### **The Lord's Supper**

Do not we use wine in the Lord's Supper? Jesus called the drink used in the Lord's Supper the "*fruit of the vine*." The Jews often referred to anything that came from the vine as vine. This does not imply a fermented or strong drink at all. Can you show that the fruit of the vine was strong drink? If you can, all you have proven is that such wine is permissible in observing the Lord's Supper. You have not shown that such wine is permissible for social drinking. But consider how the Lord required unleavened bread at the Passover Supper. This was the bread used in the Lord's Supper inasmuch as the Lord's Supper was instituted at the event of observing the Passover Supper. The Lord would not allow any bread that was fermented or leavened. Are we not presumptuous to think that He would permit a drink of such quality and nature? All the evidence is against fermented wine being used in the Lord's Supper. Even so, this is no case for alcoholic beverages.

### **Elders and Deacons**

Some turn to the following argument. Elders are forbidden the use of wine. If strong and intoxicating wine was used in the Lord's Supper, elders could not partake of it. What a position to hold! Deacons were "*not given to much wine*." This is no different from the elders. Deacons were not permitted to drink a little bit of intoxicating beverages. Whatever they were allowed, they were allowed only in moderation. What they were allowed was "oinos" and you can never show that means strong drink necessarily. The language primarily refers to a disposition of the man who is to be a deacon rather than to drinking habits.

So it is with any and every effort to justify that which provides

nothing but harm. Paul said to prove all things and hold fast to the good. Are you ready to contend that the alcoholic beverage, the alcohol industry, the result of the consumption of that beverage is good? If you are, there is nothing that will make any sense to you because you have abandoned basic integrity and honesty of judgment. You cannot secure a righteous judgment. There is no way to show that early Christians ever drank alcoholic beverages or strong drink or intoxicating drinks with approval.

On the other hand, there is abundant evidence that it is sinful to drink. Time and space for this extended article does not permit citing the numerous passages to this end, as we have done in similar lessons on the subject which are available from many sources. Even as I write I have at my side a sheet of paper containing seventy-four passages of Scripture that show drinking strong drink to be wrong. If you find one that shows it is right then you have found seventy-four contradictions in God's Word. Do you really believe God contradicts Himself? Are you willing to contend that God contradicts Himself in order to justify what has been proven to be a damnable plague on mankind from the first time men got drunk? If this evidence against drinking, little or lot, is not convincing, I must declare that you just do not really care what evidence proves. The very idea that any Christians would consider drinking of alcoholic beverages acceptable before God is disgusting, lamentable and tragic. Influence, fruits, damage to body and brain, as well as numerous specific Scriptural condemnations, anyone of these evidences is enough to cause everyone who loves the truth of of God to forever banish any sympathies for the alcoholic beverage from his mind and life. Whether this means anything to you or not depends on how honest you are and how much you are dedicated to follow God's truth.

† † † † †

## ***Figurative or Literal Son?***

Teaching is heard from modernists, and now from writings, sermons, college classrooms and lectures of some who call themselves members of the church of Christ, that Jesus was not the literal and actual Son of God, but only His Son figuratively. This really means He was not God's Son but only designated as a symbol or kind of description that was not actually and literally so.

But the child delivered by Mary was born. He could not be born with first being conceived. He could not be conceived until begotten. Who was responsible for that begetting? Was it a human being or Deity? Whoever it was, the child was the literal and actual son of the one who begot Him. There is no escape from this conclusion. He was not merely a son figuratively, but a son literally and actually. Who begot the child born of Mary?

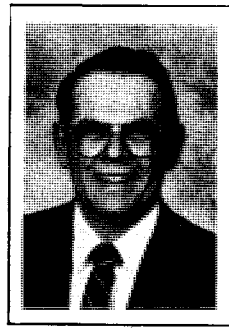
Deniers of truth claim Jesus was totally human, both father and mother being human. But Scripture says He was begotten of Deity and born of a human but virgin mother. Those who teach that Jesus is God's Son only figuratively teach denial and rank modernism regardless of pious denials they belong to that class.

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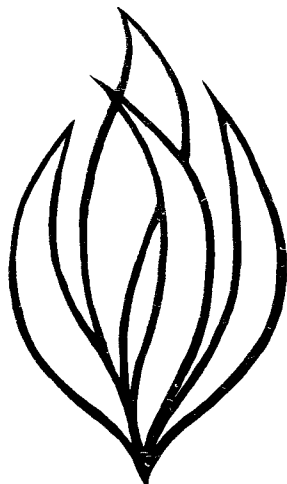
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# A Burning Fire



*"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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# ***Basis For Unity***

Oneness and unity are very popular concepts among people today, especially in religion and politics. Togetherness has been given a boost by widespread publicity of efforts that profess to promote the cause of unity. The Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church a few years ago was celebrated as an effort to produce unity. The mergers of churches among Protestants have been productive of a certain kind of "togetherness" even though it has not necessarily produced unity. Some of the largest, wealthiest and most prominent denominations have adopted new and different rules, beliefs, names and doctrines in common with other participating denominations. There are additional plans in the works among many religious people that are designed to bring unity of some fashion.

This is quite a switch from a few years ago when the leading denominational leaders were advocating division in order to allow everyone the opportunity to choose the way of serving God that was most acceptable to themselves. But the results being produced are more union than unity; more of an agreement to disagree rather than unity. It certainly is not producing the unity of which we read in Scripture.

Among members of the church of Christ there has risen renewed efforts to merge with the Christian Church. Various meetings are taking place for the purpose of creating a "friendship" atmosphere in order to bring the two groups into some kind of single body. But these efforts are producing more of the same kind of thing the denominational efforts are producing. Unity based on friendship is not what the Bible teaches. This "unity in diversity" doctrine is heresy because it simply is an agreement to disagree even on matters of doctrine, the allowance of difference to continue, each being permitted to preach and practice whatever one desires and others simply accept it as acceptable.

It has been stated that we should agree to disagree because the important thing is to "just love each other. If you disagree, that's beautiful." One said he dreamed of the time when there was no Baptist Church, Methodist Church, no church of Christ, but all would just be brothers.

One denominational leader expressed the similar idea. "There is no unanimity in doctrine, and we need diversity. We can be

unified and still have diversity in many areas, including the way which we interpret Scripture.” The plea for “unity in diversity” has been the cry of some who profess to be members of the church of Christ but who no longer advocate what they once taught and what faithful brethren continue to teach.

We cannot ignore what the prophet Amos said in Amos 3:3, *“Can two walk together except they be agreed?”* It seems that there are number of “wise men” today who would issue with the inspired prophet and contend that this part of the *“word that the Lord hath spoken”* has become outdated.

The kind of union being accomplished results from negotiation much like that of nations trying to draw a treaty between them, or like labor and management coming to a new contract. “You give up this; I’ll give up that.” Past convictions are sacrificed and are no longer important to some. Doctrine is changed and whatever somebody wants is accepted. That which was once disbelieved can be believed and that which was once believed can be denied without any adverse consequences.

### **Roman Unity**

Romanism also wants unity. They would have everyone under the authority of the papacy. Many Protestants have said this is no longer a serious barrier to getting together. To a great extent the Vatican Council was a move to gather the naive and gullible Protestant world into a compromise disposition and come under the influence of Rome. Romanists have presented themselves as being more tolerant and have lulled many into complacency of Rome’s ultimate goal of domination. The determination to rule over everyone has not been changed in Rome, nor has there been a retreat by Romanists from the position to suppress every other religious view but Rome’s view. Where Rome has the power this suppression is very much evident and practiced without shame.

So much that is called “Christian” is not what the Bible defines as being of Christ. There are even “Christians” who are willing to enter into religious fellowship with those of the Jewish faith who deny Jesus is the Son of God and Savior of mankind. All such things are happening under the passion for what is called “brotherliness and unity.” Ministers, Roman priests, Jewish rabbis and all kinds of clergymen attempt to work alongside each other as if their differences make no difference. Once I attended a meeting announced to be about the Dead Sea Scrolls. It

turned out to be a meeting of a local ministerial association and met at a Jewish synagogue. Since it was supposed to be a historical lecture rather than a religious service, I decided to remain for the historical speech. But the meeting was opened with a prayer, led by a Methodist minister, who said that out of respect for their host, the Jews, he would not pray in the name of Christ. Before that day was over he was informed that he showed more respect for the host than for the Lord he claimed to serve. I saw to it that he heard this.

How many religious people, even members of the church of Christ, will refer to a Roman priest as "father" in spite of the specific prohibition of such a thing in Matthew 23:9. These things I have emphasized to show the fervor for unity, oneness and togetherness and the price many are willing to pay to have some semblance of it. It is an infection of compromise, void of Biblical teaching, malignant with the exaltation of man over God and His Son, saturated with the insipid "just be honest and sincere" attitude and that is all that is necessary. More and more of the graduates from schools operated by members of the church of Christ are pouring out this same religious venom from their pulpits and writings. It is so evident in their compromise with digression and denominationalism.

### **None of These**

The church of the Lord revealed in Scripture is neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jew. Unity is not a new subject not a new plea. The Founder of the faith of Christ prayed, John 17:20,21, *"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."* Jesus taught unity in 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."*

The apostles repeatedly urged brethren to be of the same mind, judgment, and stand together in the same standard, condemning division and factions of those who followed different doctrines (First Corinthians 1:10; Galatians 1:6-9). The idea of unity is of Christ, but the way to achieve that unity must also be of Christ. Psalm 127:1, *"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it..."* Union is not

necessarily unity. It matters not how much people get together if God's will is not respected and served.

### **Anything for Togetherness**

I am amazed at what religious people outside the church are willing to do for a misnamed unity. But I am stunned, embarrassed and ashamed at what some members of the church are willing to do. Basic fundamental principles that are indispensable to restore the faith of the New Testament in our time are being cast aside. While there have been numerous and needless divisions over matters of human judgment among brethren, we cannot allow the desire for unity to permit us to abandon the idea that what one believes no longer really matters that much. There are those who are now saying the doctrine of Christ about music in worship, marriage and divorce, the kingdom, the inspiration of the Scriptures, the Lord's Supper, and even that Jesus is actually and literally the Son of God are not worth dividing those who prefer to say they remain united.

Division is a waste, creates confusion, destroys influence and paves the way for infidelity. As one little boy moaned one Sunday as his mother went one way and his father went another, "I wish God had made only one church." The truth is, that is exactly what God did. But people have left His way for their own. One major reason atheism grows is because those who claim they believe in Christ are so hopelessly divided to the disgust of everyone.

Division results from disrespect of divine authority. Following different rules cannot bring unity. Those that encourage division by being unwilling to abide in the doctrine of Christ are enemies of God, not His friends and servants.

### **The Only Basis**

There is only one basis for religious unity. It is respect for the truth of God as revealed in the Bible. Please consult the array of Scriptures I cannot quote for the sake of space, but cite for your investigation. Galatians 1:8,9; Philippians 1:27; 2:1,2; First Corinthians 1:10; Second Timothy 3:16,17; First Peter 4:11; Second John 9-11 and others that could be added.

There can be no allowance for variance where God has spoken. There can be no addition or subtraction from His Word. We can only allow what God allows and must forbid what God

forbids. We must have divine authority for all we do (Colossians 3:17). Unity can be produced only through soundness and loyalty to the doctrine of Christ. Such a contention is not legalism, partysim, nor void of love. It is love for the truth and is held because of the motive of love for what God has spoken. One does not show "love" by ignoring the doctrine Christ taught. It is shameful that many even in the church no longer have a real love for the truth but prefer some kind of disgressive oneness with those who follow doctrinal error.

Christians must work for unity but never compromise truth. God hates every false way and so should we. This may demand that we stand against some brethren betimes. Paul did (Galatians 2:4,5; Romans 16:17; First Corinthians 5). False doctrine produces division. Truth produces unity.

### **Allowed Judgment**

There is a realm where human judgment must be exercised and is allowed. Man's judgment cannot set aside God's revelation, however. There are matters where God has made certain things necessary but has not been specific how to accomplish what He demands. Men must do what God said nonetheless, using his own judgment to carry out these things. But consideration of each other in matters of human judgment, opinion and allowable options should never be taken into the realm where divine authority has spoken and must never set aside the necessity of His authority for what we say and do.

Why should one think that holding firm to the faith is not having the right spirit? Why should one sacrifice love to stand sound in doctrine? This is not necessary. Where one goes so should the other. Love does not allow compromise, however. Standing firm does not demand dictatorial legalism of human ways. How else can we show love for Deity except we obey (John 15:14; First John 5:3).

The basis for unity is "*speaking the truth in love.*" (Ephesians 4:15). We must do the right thing with the right motive. We shall teach the truth and nothing else, but with a love for God, His truth and our fellowman, especially brethren. We shall hate no person, but hate every false and evil way while we love even those who follow destructive ways. We shall not compromise one point of the doctrine of Christ to simply "get along" with anybody, anywhere, anytime. To do so would be a victory for Satan. Human opinions shall not take rank with

divine truth. Nor shall divine truth be relegated to the same optional position as human opinions.

The church in every age has been beset with weaknesses and problems. Our age is no different. The forces of morality are crippled by division. Those who follow liberalism or human legalism have much for which to answer in creating division. Only a kind but firm stand for *"thus saith the Lord"* will be acceptable. Extremes beget extremes. Truth will dispel all error. Unity is possible but only on the basis of truth. Truth is knowable, attainable and sufficiently revealed. On this we take our stand in life and on which we rely for the welfare of the soul before God in eternity.

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## ***All The Counsel of God***

Acts 20:26,27, *"Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."*

It is probably fair to say that this lesson is one to which most will listen politely but do very little about conforming to its teaching. The speaker was Paul. The hearers were the elders of the church at Ephesus. Paul was nearing the end of his third missionary tour. He had asked the elders to meet him in the city of Miletus as he was making his way back toward Jerusalem. These words are a portion of Paul's farewell to these brethren.

There were many important admonitions and warnings given during this session between the apostle and the elders. We shall consider this one statement by Paul, not only to get a better grasp of the work that Paul did, his word, deed and attitude, but to understand his sense of responsibility and the discharge of his duty that we also should develop and discharge.

It is an understatement to say that this was a solemn comment. It indicates Paul understood that he was his brother's keeper. He knew he had a duty to those around him and would be accountable for his influence. Beginning with Cain and Abel to the story of the Good Samaritan we are taught responsibility toward others. Paul spent his life trying to discharge that duty.



## **Paul Was Pure**

He said, *"I am pure from the blood of all men."* Paul was not denying he had been guilty of shedding blood. As a persecutor of the same Christ that he later preached he had caused much grief and suffering, even bloodshed, consenting to the death of Stephen and doubtless countless others. But he had reference to having discharged his responsibility toward other people. He had done what he could to persuade Jew and Gentile to accept the salvation offered by Jesus Christ on the terms of the gospel. Their blood, their sins, their punishment was on their own hands, not his. He was not accountable for the fact that they refused to follow Christ. Their lost condition was not because he had failed in his duty toward them but was their own doing. He was pure of their blood. This should be the desire of every Christian toward everyone around them. We should want to have done what we can do that others might be saved. We cannot be as Pilate and wash our hands of our responsibility. We should work to be able to say with Paul, *"I am pure of the blood of all men."*

## **Why He Was Pure**

How was it that Paul could be sure that he had done his duty? He explains what he had done to qualify him to make such a statement. *"I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God."* Had Paul pulled back, withdrawn from teaching God's Word, withheld any part of it, watered it down to please men, tampered with it to fit men rather than serve God, sought to soothe and satisfy rather than save, given his hearers what they wanted in preference to what they needed, he could not have claimed to have done his task. He would stand accountable before God for having failed in his duty. Paul did not compromise truth in any fashion in order to accomodate anyone that did not wish to accept it.

How confident can you be that you are pure from the blood of those around you? How many, near and far, have never been told the story of salvation through Christ? This strikes us all with a sense of guilt. I speak not of those in distant lands, states and countries, although these are included. I know that no one person can cover the entire earth by himself. But what of our friends and neighbors in various religious bodies that are still lost because they have not yet obeyed the gospel? What of even

members of our families with whom we have contact so often? To ask the question about our duty is to indict most of us with neglect in the primary matters of Christianity. That we have not accomplished our task is apparent. How long before we arise to the task in greater zeal and put preaching the Word foremost in our lives, putting the interests of God before our own? Or is it not better to state that we should make our interests harmonize with His?

We do not detract from the many good things done over the years by faithful brethren. These things are said to provoke each of us to never be content with having done a small part of the job. While we shall likely never bring the world to Christ, it is our responsibility to see that Christ is preached to the world. What people do regarding Him after hearing His truth is their own responsibility.

### **Preach It All**

We wonder why many who preach do not preach all the counsel of God. It must be proclaimed so people can know what God expects. We cannot teach what we do not know. There is no portion of revelation from God that we can dismiss as unimportant. Obviously, we cannot declare all of it at one time. But surely, over the years, we should be rightly accused of having proclaimed it all.

Those who preach dare not go beyond what is written, neither adding to nor taking from. Doing so invites God's anathema upon oneself (Galatians 1:6-9). The things we must do, the things from which we are to abstain, morality, promises, hopes, commands, virtues, warnings, all are a part of God's counsel. There are positive and negative themes in Scripture. Why do some seem to think that there is something superior to emphasizing one side of truth to the neglect of the other side?

It is appropriate to say at this point that there is a serious responsibility assumed upon becoming a Christian. This responsibility is enlarged when one becomes a teacher. James 3:1, *"My brethren, be not many masters [teachers], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation."* This was not written to frighten nor discourage people from teaching, but to impress upon them the seriousness of their work and the responsibility that is their's in that work. Whether one teaches publicly or privately, he has a duty to not withhold the truth that must be taught for any motive or reason.

## **Whatever the Consequences**

Because adverse consequences may result from declaring the whole counsel of God we still cannot afford to let this deter us from doing it. Jesus forewarned His apostles that times would come when they might have to shake the dust off their feet against those who refused to hear. There are many, yea, most, that will reject the truth today. But this does not mean we can cease to proclaim it. We heard of a so-called gospel preacher degrading a point of truth recently because, as he explained, "Christian Church people do not accept that as an argument." It matters not whether they accept the lesson of Nadab and Abihu and the necessity for having authority for what is done. The truth is the truth whether they or anyone accepts it or rejects it. Why should we profess to be preachers of truth if we think we should dismiss any part of it simply because some do not accept it? Whose will are we to follow?

Truth is not always joyfully received. Are we surprised? We should not be. Jesus said, John 15:18, *"If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."* John wrote, First John 3:13, *"Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you."* We must stand ready to proclaim and defend the truth at all times. Many so-called preachers will do this unless it places in jeopardy their income, popularity and acceptance. Paul said he was *"ready to die if needs be"* for the truth. He was set for its defense.

Much truth is unpopular to the world. With atheism, modernism, liberalism, humanism, permissiveness, indulgence, worldliness and compromise dominating the scene, alongside brotherhood lethargy, indifference, ignorance and the infection of "go-along-ism," those who will declare the whole counsel of God are not often received very well.

But gospel preachers are not in a popularity contest anyway. We are battling for the souls of men, women, boys and girls, the welfare of the home and church. If those who profess to preach the truth will not preach all the truth, without fear or favor, just who can we expect to undertake the task?

## **An Awesome Duty**

Take your Bible and consider the charge given in Ezekiel 33:1-9. The passage is too long to write here, but please read it. It states the very truth that Paul realized and discharged. God

gave Ezekiel a duty and expected him to fulfill it. It is no different with Christians today. The church is to proclaim, defend, protect and advance the truth in this world (First Timothy 3:15). The attitude that we are saved, we know God, let us be therewith content, will produce our own downfall. Preaching the gospel to the world is the number one work of the church. If and when present day members of the church assume the stance that this is important, as many have seemed to assume an importance to recreation, entertainment, fun and games, then we will come closer to being able to say with Paul his claim of being pure from the blood of others. How can Christians take the funds of treasures and build themselves playrooms with souls dying by the thousands without ever having heard of Christ? It is beyond rational comprehension and certainly an affront to faithfulness!

It is equally bewildering how some allow their "preachers" to be more of a public relations promoter and playground director than one who knows and preaches the whole counsel of God. It is a disgrace before God. The indisputable fact which Paul comments is that we have a duty, there can be no departure from God's counsel, there can be no compromise with error regardless of who, whether in or out of the church. There can be no slackening of the pace to win souls. Rather there must be a self-examination by every Christian (not just those who preach publicly) regarding the work of reaching the lost. We cannot afford to go about this work as timidly and sloppily as is so often done.

Let us make no mistake. These words are neither sensational, overly-critical nor overdrawn in application. With the world, even the society of our own nation, collapsing in sin around us, with abundant spiritual and moral decay, with truth being buried beneath the increasing rubbish of false doctrines, we either do the job or we and our children shall be among those that perish. Let us be fully aware that so long as we live we have this duty to God and mankind to declare all the counsel of God to the whole world. Only in this way can we ever be pure of their blood.

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# ***Grace Through Faith***

Romans 3:24, "...justified freely by his grace..." Ephesians 2:5,8,9, "...[By grace are ye saved]... For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." Titus 3:3-7 includes the phrase, "...that being justified by his grace."

Paul was the inspired writer of each of these phrases. The theme is salvation by the grace of God, accrediting the salvation of man to God. Anyone who believes the Bible believes that man is saved by grace. Paul had been preaching between twenty and twenty-five years, had been on three missionary journeys, endured opposition from Jew and Gentile, boldly contending with those who insisted that one must be circumcised to be saved. The inspiration of the Holy Spirit utilizes his vast experience and knowledge and directs him to write this teaching.

A cardinal plank in the Christian platform is salvation by grace. It is not a question whether we are saved by grace or not because we are. But we must learn when we are saved by grace; how are we saved by grace; what is the meaning of salvation by grace. Unless we understand we shall misunderstand.

Grace means unmerited favor, receiving an unearned gift, being rewarded on the basis of the merit of another. When we speak of grace we have in mind God's part in God's plan for man's salvation. It is that which God has done and without which there would be no salvation.

## **Not Grace Only**

The Bible does not teach salvation by grace only. There is no such statment nor insinuation in Scripture as if there was nothing else involved but God's grace. If salvation was by grace alone, all would be saved because Titus 2:11 tells us the grace of God has appeared to all. If some were saved and some lost then God would be a respecter of persons, a trait inspired writers denied. If anyone was lost it would be God's fault or because of God's inability and inadequacy of His grace to cover sins. This is also denied in Romans 5:20.

When a person sins, if he received his just due, he would die and suffer eternal punishment for his deed. That man can be

saved from sin at all is due to the grace of God. God is under no obligation to the sinner. Whatever provision God has made for man's salvation is due to God's favor extended to man, a favor man could never deserve. What God has done is not a payment of debt to mankind. As we learn more fully the entire system of salvation we learn that many elements are involved. It is a system of faith, blood, works of obedience to the law of Christ, but we are now considering more closely the fact that the system is one of grace.

### **Grace and Works**

Paul contrasted salvation by grace with salvation by works or law. While there are works of obedience commanded in the law of Christ, there are works by which we cannot be saved. Certainly we are not saved but condemned by the works of the flesh (Galatians 5:19ff). Nor are we saved by the works of the law of Moses (Romans 3:20; Galatians 2:16; 5:4). Our texts included the teaching that we are not saved by works of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9). Let us consider an illustration of this last kind of works.

One may be accused of murder and is brought before the proper tribunal. If declared innocent he deserves to go free because his works make it so. If he is found guilty he may be set free by the grace of the court, forgiven, but not because of his own works and their worth. His deed would condemn him but the grace of the court freed him. Regardless of the number of good deeds he might perform thereafter, he would never make his action of murder a righteous one. So it is with man in sin. He can never do enough good by his own works of merit to erase the guilt of even one sin.

If man never sinned, lived perfectly, he would never need the saving blood shed on Calvary. God would owe him heaven because he deserved it. Romans 3:9, 10, 23 removes that possibility forever. Who could say that there has never been a day without a sinful word or deed or thought? Who could claim such a thing for his entire lifetime? Our redemption and forgiveness is due to the grace of God and never apart from it. It is never by the kind of works of our own personal worth or merit. Mankind just cannot earn heaven.

But this does not mean that man has no works of any kind to perform in order to be saved. God's system of grace is also a system of law (Romans 8:2; 7:22; 3:27; James 1:25; Galatians

6:2; Romans 7:25). Law must be obeyed. Abraham was saved by works (James 1:21), but by what kind of works? Matthew 7:21 teaches the necessity of our doing the will of God. On Pentecost Peter told people what they had to do to receive the remission of sins. He further instructed them to save themselves. They could not save themselves by themselves, but there was a role they must perform in order to be saved. They were not passive in the matter. Christ is the author of eternal salvation to the obedient (Hebrews 5:9). While salvation is by grace, it is by grace that is appropriated through faith (Ephesians 2:8). We have access to this grace by faith (Romans 5:2).

## **Faith**

Faith is a work (John 6:29). To be saved by faith is to be saved by works and by works we take advantage of the grace God has extended. Faith is a work of God because God commanded it. But it is man that must believe and exercise that faith. Faith causes man to work (Galatians 5:6). Such works of obedience to the law of Christ are motivated by love. Such work makes faith perfect (whole, complete) (James 2:22-26). While we read of different kinds of faith in the Bible (weak, dead, little perfected, great) the faith that saves is the faith that obeys. Paul mentioned at the start and finish of that great epistle on grace and faith the obedience of faith (Romans 1:5; 16:26). There is no conflict between grace, faith and obedience to law.

## **Obedience**

So we can see that when one obeys God he is saved by grace through faith. When a man obeys from the heart that doctrine delivered he is not trying to earn his way to heaven. He is respecting the grace system that includes faith and obedience. When is man saved by grace? It is when he obeys the law of Christ. Saved by faith is appropriating the benefits of the grace of God. All the faith in the world and all the obedience in the world would avail nothing except the grace of God has declared it to be essential.

The book of Romans teaches extensively about God's grace. There is great antagonism between grace and sin and how grace is more abundant than sin, more powerful than sin, able to remove all sin. All of the briers, thistles, sickness, pain, sorrow, jealousy, enmity, hatred, war, bloodshed of fellowmen, death

and everything evil exists because of the mighty tide of sin unleashed in Eden. No person, except Jesus Christ, has escaped the guilt of sin. He lived perfectly (Hebrews 4:15; First Peter 1:22). Even the Lord was subjected to temptation but never yielded to it. The influence and power of sin cannot be measured because of its magnitude.

### **Grace Sufficient**

Yet, the grace of God that is offered through Christ (John 1:17), is more abundant and powerful and superior to sin. Grace, as with a mighty sweeping hand, meets this dark onrushing tide of spiritual devastation, death and woe and rolls it back, freeing man from its peril, giving him glory in its stead. Romans 5:20, "*But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.*" Through sin we lost access to the tree of life, but through Christ we have entrance into the gates of the eternal city. Through sin we spiritually die, being separated from God. But by grace through Christ we are quickened, made alive. Through sin we lost our physical bodies, but by grace we receive an incorruptible spiritual body. Through sin we are lost, but by grace we are saved. Regardless of how deep and crimson the stain of sin is, the grace of God is sufficient to blot it out forever. Away forever with the idea that one can become too evil to be saved and could never be forgiven. One may well go so far that he will not heed the call of the gospel, but if one does what he is taught to do in the law of Christ, the grace of God will cover his sin. It covered the slaughter of Christians as committed by Saul of Tarsus. It covered idolators, adulterers such as at Corinth. It even covered the murder of the Son of God such as Pentecost. There is no such thing as an unpardonable and unforgiveable sin when and if the terms of pardon as given in the system of grace are met by an obedient faith.

### **Offered to All**

One final point on the grace of God. Romans 10:12,13, "*For there is no difference between the Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.*" God created mankind, saw man's need of salvation, provided a system of salvation and offered salvation to all who would come to Him. He is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34,35). The



need of salvation is universal and the offer is universally made. The first century Jews never considered salvation to be open to Gentiles but considered themselves saved because they were fleshly descendants of Abraham. Paul taught that the one who is a child of God (Jew) is one who has been spiritually circumcised (putting away sin, Ephesians 2:11-13) rather than those physically circumcised as required under Moses. None have reason to boast. None are elected to salvation except on the merit of Christ. All shall be saved the same way. We are lost due to our sins. We can be saved due to the gift of God's Son who shed His blood by which we can be washed clean.

In summary: Salvation is by grace; appropriated by faith; a faith that leads to obedience to God's law and enables us to reach the saving blood of Christ. We reach that blood when we obey the command to be baptized (Romans 6:3,4;. It is then and there that the grace of God saves us from sin and we are able to rise to a newness of life.

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## ***No Man Cared For My Soul***

The Old Testament provides us with great spiritual thoughts and displays of eternal principles in God's dealing with mankind alongside vivid accounts of outstanding personalities in the history of Israel. It teaches us the gradual unfolding and revelation of God's scheme to redeem man. One of the more notable characters of the Old Testament is David.

The first king of Israel was Saul. It was during his reign that David rose from an obscure shepherd boy to a national hero by his encounter with Goliath. Throughout his life he was a renowned warrior and for many years the backbone of Israel. When he killed the giant Philistine the people sang his praises, proclaiming how Saul had slain his thousands but David his ten thousands.

Saul, failing to recognize the value of David to his kingdom, and unwilling to accept David's rise to prominence, grew jealous and set out to destroy David. As a result of Saul's pursuit of him, David became a fugitive, fleeing for his life, going from place to

place, trying to stay alive in the very nation he had helped preserve and defend.

More than once it seemed that Saul had David cornered and David's death seemed inevitable. But as Saul would move for the kill, God would intervene and enable David to escape. In such times, when all seemed lost, David would utter cries of distress to the Lord. He realized he had no hope and no refuge except in God. By himself he would be powerless, without a way to escape, subject to his enemy. Even those he befriended would betray him if convenient for them to do so.

### **David Could Remember**

Later in life as David reflected upon those distressing times, the Holy Spirit caused him to write the prayer for relief and deliverance such as he had prayed. This is the nature of the one hundred forty second Psalm.

*"I cried unto the Lord with my voice; with my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication. I poured out my complaint before him; I showed before him my trouble. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was not man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living. Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I. Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me."*

His pitiable plea is much like that of a sinner who realizes he is under condemnation, having no escape from the torment that awaits him, being alone, helpless, exposed to ruin that the devil has provided. All people that reach the age of accountability before God are in that state at one time or another because all have sinned (Romans 3:23), and none has the power to redeem himself or herself standing alone.

The extent of David's anxiety and grief is seen in the words, "No man cared for my soul." Nobody cared whether he lived or died or what he did. This is an expression of complete dejection, a sense of being abandoned, one of loneliness and resignation to destruction and despair. He felt so unwanted and undeserving. Has David been the last to suffer such feelings? Is it

not true that every sinner who has realized his separation from God knows what David is saying?

### **Care for the Soul**

What is it to care for the soul of man? It involves recognizing certain things, including the fact that man is an immortal being. Man not only has a soul, but is a soul. He has been created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). God is Spirit (John 4:24). Therefore, man is spirit as well as a fleshly body. Acts 17:28 teaches we are the offspring of God and God is named as the Father of spirits (Hebrews 12:9). Job 32: 8, *"There is a spirit in man."* Second Corinthians 4:16 speaks of the inner man and outer man, having reference to the immortal soul within the mortal body. Solomon says of the body that it returns to the dust from whence it came, but the spirit returns to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7). The soul is that part of man which differs from the body and is not dissolved by death of the body nor ceases to exist at the death of the body. It is the spirit of man and it survives physical death at which time there is a separation of body from spirit (James 2:26).

To care for the soul includes the conviction of its worth. The care we give something generally is in proportion to the value we place upon it. A child is more valuable than his toy. A diamond is more valuable than a piece of glass. We ought to care for the soul because of its worth.

Jesus placed the value on man's soul. Matthew 16:26, *"What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"* A person makes a serious mistake to think he is of no value. The Lord considers him or her worth more than the whole world. This is why it is a tragedy that even one soul is lost.

### **Danger to the Soul**

Caring for the soul includes the recognition of the danger to which the soul is exposed. First Peter 2:11, *"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul."* Matthew 10:28, *"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."*

James 5:20 teaches a soul can be saved from death.

Therefore, the soul is exposed to death, spiritual death, which is an eternal separation from God and His blessings.

The most precious of things pertaining to man, his soul, is open to the gravest and most treacherous kinds of dangers.

### **Effort to Save**

Caring for the soul includes a zealous exertion to the salvation of the soul. A person would be considered cruel who would allow even a beast to suffer and not give reasonable effort to relieve it. But there be many who make less effort to save the soul than would a fireman to rescue a kitten from a tree. Having the power to save the perishing soul and neglecting what must be done to that end is beyond expression and comprehension.

To my fellow Christians, let me remind you, if others had not cared for us we would also perish. Somebody cared enough to teach and persuade us to serve the Lord. Is it not ingratitude if we do not make similar efforts to save others? Possibly greater efforts would be made by us if we were truly convinced that those who die out of Christ have no word of hope. Such an attitude is fatal to the one who is lost, but it is also fatal to those who should be making the effort to save.

We can be saved through the Word of God. James 1:21, *"...receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls."* First Peter 1:23, *"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever."* It is by our obedience to that truth that our souls are purified (First Peter 1:22.)

### **Not All Do Care**

But one of life's hard realities is that not everyone will care for your soul. Who is it that does not care? Obviously, those who deny you are a soul do not care. Those who deny the existence of God do not care. This includes many otherwise intelligent people, even highly educated people, who make themselves fools by declaring there is no God (Psalm 19:10). Such people pollute our colleges and universities and contaminate every realm of life's activities. The sophisticates of the present modern and progressive age who place total emphasis on the material to the neglect of the spirit, even denying the existence of the spirit, have no concern for your soul.

Such people deny the inspiration of the Scriptures, the reality

of the miracles recorded therein, mock the Deity of Jesus Christ, and would also destroy your faith with sophistry and fallacious "reasoning," pseudo-science and would remove forever the standards of morality given by our Lord. They would have you live hopelessly as are they.

Those like the ones Paul mentioned in Philippians 3:19, whose god is their belly, have no care for your soul. Their glory is their shame. They mind earthly things, taking pride in the very things for which they ought be ashamed. There is an abundance of people willing to sell their souls for the mess of this world's pottage, even as Esau sold his birthright. They are willing to forget God and the need of salvation while grasping for the temporal, fleeting, sinful pleasure, power and recognitions this life can offer. There be those whose morality, virtue and honesty is so near non-existence that they will dissipate themselves for gain, and would do the same to you, by peddling to you that which defiles both mind and body. They are the merchants of vice, crime, illegal drugs, pornography, alcoholic beverages, nicotine, sensuality and lawlessness. They care not for your soul. They are more concerned for dollars than decency, loving money more than morality.

False religious teachers corrupt the Word of God by including the doctrines of men as found in their creeds, disciplines, manuals, catechism, philosophies, prayer books, confessionals, theories and theologies. They negate God's commands as something optional. They allow what God forbids and bind what God does not bind. They discount God's goodness and scoff at His severity. The religious world is blighted by those who seek not your good, but your goods. They are devoted to hobbies, compromises, seeking fame and fortune with sacrifices of truth, acting as hirelings, puppets and lackeys for their own profit.

All the good intentions, beautiful and pious actions in the world cannot offset the carelessness for man's soul when one is willing to depart from the truth and so teach. Beware of those who would flatter you with enticing words that are contrary to God's Word!

Parents often show no care even for the souls of their young. The last people on earth you would think would not care for the soul would be a father or mother. The true Christian parent cares more than the child shall ever realize until that child also becomes a Christian parent. Doubtless many parents, who think they love their children, would be offended if accused of not caring for their children. They work long and hard to provide the

physical needs. But what of the spiritual needs? Parents have such tools as authority, words, discipline, power, example, strength and God's written guidance to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

But does one show care for the child's soul when spiritual training is not put first in the home? Where is the care when the matters of the Bible and Christ's church are relegated to secondary positions? Where is the care when a poor example is set? What care is there when the parent does not obey the gospel? These are basic questions that deserve answers.

### **Who Cares?**

Who does care for the soul? Obviously, God does, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit (John 3:16; First Peter 5:6,7). We sing the song that asks, *Does Jesus Care?* There is never a time when He does not care. How He wept over the city of Jerusalem because He cared (Matthew 23:37). He wants all to come to repentance (Second Peter 3:9). Consider what He has done on man's behalf and the question of His care is answered.

Angels care. There is rejoicing in heaven among them over one sinner that repenteth (Luke 15:7)

Gospel preachers care, as do sincere Bible class teachers. Elders care. Loved ones in Christ care. None who shall read these words can ever cry as did David when he thought, "*No man cared for my soul.*" It is sad when anyone thinks nobody cares. But it is sadder still when one does not care enough for his own soul to obey and be saved. This is a care that nobody can give for you. Do you care for your own soul? If so, how much? What will you do to reflect that care? Will you obey?

† † † † †

### **Do You Make Him Famous?**

Mark 1:28, "*And immediately his fame spread abroad throughout all the region round about Galilee.*"

The things Jesus did were talked about by many people. This is the way people came to know of Him. Should not we be talking about Him so His fame will spread abroad today?

# ***The Test of Fullness***

There is but one point of major emphasis in this lesson. By the time we reach Deuteronomy eight in reading the Bible, Israel was free from Egypt, living under the leadership of Moses, and nearing the end of forty years in the wilderness. Leadership was soon to change hands from Moses to Joshua who would take Israel across Jordan into the promised land of Canaan. Moses spoke to his people, rehearsed God's law, and reminded them of the covenant made with the Lord.

Chapter eight is the recollection of the hardships and rigors of the forty years in the wilderness. It had been a time when Israel was helpless without God. God had supplied them their food and drink, clothing and protection, guidance and direction. Under these circumstances, with a few exceptions, Israel found no difficulty in remaining humble and mindful of the providence and love of God. The trials and tests of the wilderness had called forth faith, courage, endurance, devotion and determination. Some had failed and rebelled against God, turning to idols. But soon the nation would face a new and different kind of test. A new day was dawning for Israel.

## **Another Kind of Test**

Their wanderings would soon cease and they would build permanent homes. The poverty, hunger and thirst of the past would soon be behind them and they would inhabit a good land with brooks of water, fountains, grain, vineyards, fig trees, houses, flocks, peace and prosperity. They would have rest and rejoice that their battles were won, their trials behind them, problems conquered, and all would be well. But this would be true only to a limited extent. Having faced the test of adversity, they would now face the test of prosperity.

Often this second test is more difficult than the first because it is more deceptive, subtle and blinding. It often takes a stronger character to be true to God in success than in hardship. Blessings, wrongfully accepted, misunderstood and misapplied, can become as a millstone about our necks. Moses therefore warns Israel lest their coming to prosperity be their undoing and they fall victim to its perils, even though they had passed the many tests of wanderings.

This is a timely thought for our land of relative abundance. It is needful for everyone who seems to succeed. The principles of Deuteronomy eight should concern us, especially as we see multitudes seeking more and more material gain, hosts of people discarding spiritual values in their mad rush for pleasure, power, popularity and possession. We hear repeatedly of our greatness and accomplishments, the praise of our own genius, as if God has had nothing whatever to do with our welfare and good fortune. It is a rare thing for men to assign credit to God that things are as well with us as they are. Pride runs rampant in the land and haughtiness is prevalent. Materialism has become the watchword. All of this has created a neglect of the soul.

### **The Temptations**

The perils Israel would face would be temptations to be self-indulgent and over-indulgent. Whereas poverty demanded discipline, rationing, denial, restriction and dependence, wealth can lead to extravagance, indulgence, waste, selfishness, gluttony and surfeiting. People in need cannot indulge in things that men of abundance feel they can afford. But people of abundance are tempted to indulge themselves in that which they do not need, even to their own destruction.

Self-indulgence is a violation of good stewardship, a departure from discipline, and can and will eventually cause ruin. Solomon warned, Proverbs 23:2, *"And put a knife to thy throat, if thou be a man given to appetite."* This refers to those who surrender themselves to their own lusts, desires, appetites and wants.

An abundance of this world's goods, if not kept under control, will weaken moral fibre and character, spoiling one into thinking he must accomodate every whim, wish and fancy. Great danger exists in losing possession of possessions and becoming possessed by them. There is power in wealth. It takes courage, morality, high standards and self-control to rightly handle that power and use it to God's glory.

Material prosperity tempts man to forsake God. It does not have to be that way, but too often is. Paul warned against this (First Timothy 6:10). *"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."* When one is in the shade of ease he is liable to forget God and how He sustained him under the heat of the sun. When at rest we can forget how it was in time of labor and trouble. Good



fortune can becloud the memory of God's providence. Often the mercy of God is remembered only when we suffer loss, but too seldom when we enjoy gain.

### **Shall We Forget?**

We plead for God's hand to supply us but once supplied we forget about the hand that provided. Is it not improper to be mindful of God only when we are asking of Him, but forgetful of Him and neglectful of gratitude once we have received from Him? Who can justify such attitudes and actions?

Probably the tendency to forget God in good times stems from the sin of pride, making ourselves our own gods. Moses warned Israel lest *"thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."* Adversity may depress; but prosperity can cause us to be presumptuous, arrogant, self-willed and puffed up. When people reach heights never before reached, they may be prone to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think. They may begin to feel that their success is due to their own power, the might of their own hand, rather than remember they are but co-workers with God and helpless without Him. Pride is akin to making a god of oneself. *"Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall."* (Proverbs 16:18). Having a full table and plenty of everything can become our undoing. God resisteth the proud and prosperity tempts one to become proud. When that is the case, our bounty becomes our enemy rather than our friend.

### **Many Fail**

It is the exception, not the rule, that frail men can pass the test of prosperity. Consider Israel, both individuals and the nation, once they entered the land that flowed with milk and honey. Many otherwise good people in less wealthy circumstances have met their physical, mental, social and spiritual ruin when they became "better off" materially. Jesus said, Matthew 19:24, *"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."* He taught, Matthew 6:19,20, *"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where*

*thieves do not break through nor steal.*" Less wealthy people are likely to feel more keenly their dependence on God while the wealthy may be inclined to trust in riches (First Timothy 6:17). Jesus does not condemn riches per se, nor prudence in using one's talents and diligently acting intelligently regarding material wealth. He condemns placing trust in the perishable and giving little heed to the matters of the spirit.

Nebuchadnezzar failed the test of fullness. He said, *"Is not this great Babylon that I have built for a house of the kingdom by the might of my power..."* (Daniel 4:30). But he was brought low, driven to live with the beasts until he recognized the power of God. The rich fool of Luke twelve fell victim to his own success and was unable to cope with plenty, being deceived into thinking his material welfare reflected his spiritual welfare. The rich man of Luke 16:19-25, though clothed in purple and fine linen and faring sumptuously every day, was blinded by his wealth and indifferent to the poor. *"So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."* (Luke 12:21).

The very nation Moses warned often fell into apostasy under the influence of their prosperity. They eventually lost their land altogether and their identity as a nation. Repeatedly they were deluded by their successes into forsaking God, only to suffer ruin and collapse. This is the lesson and warning we must heed and not allow ourselves to become victims of a similar destiny.

### **Who Is Wealthy?**

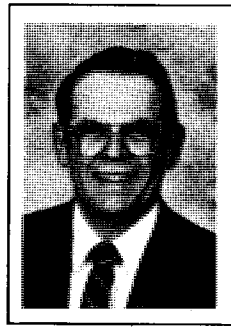
We may be inclined to categorize as wealthy only those who have more than we do we. But wealth is a relative matter. Comparing most of us in our land with the people of the world generally, we would fall into the classification of the wealthy. We have our physical needs provided, health care, luxuries, freedom, family, opportunities, jobs, protection, plus the unspeakable spiritual blessings that are in Christ. We never know whether there will be ill winds of adversity or the good breezes of prosperity to come upon us in the future. Most realize the need of God in hard times. But the admonition of this lesson, exemplified before us by Israel, that we must remember the Lord in good times as well as hard times; in the calm as well as the storm ; in victory as well as defeat; in joy as well as sorrow.

† † † † †



## ***Virgin or Just Girl***

Luke teaches the virgin birth of Christ. He declares by inspiration that an announcement was made "*to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.*" (Luke 1:27). She was a virgin when the announcement was made to her. In spite of her virginity, she would bear a son whose name would be Jesus. The Today's English Version removes the word "*virgin*" and changes it to merely a "*girl*." While a girl may be a virgin, it is not necessarily so. Another passage affirming the virgin birth would be removed if we adopted the absurd position that the version one uses is merely a matter of opinion, as some collegiate administrators would have you believe. Let those who think so get up and preach that Mary was just a "*girl*". They might discover many brethren do not believe a preacher can preach from just any version and still teach the truth. Advocates of the perverted versions will tell you just about anything. They are as unreliable as the modern perversions they condone. Why do professed believers wish to uphold so-called "bibles" that lie about our Lord? Is there no shame in Israel?



**JAMES W. BOYD**

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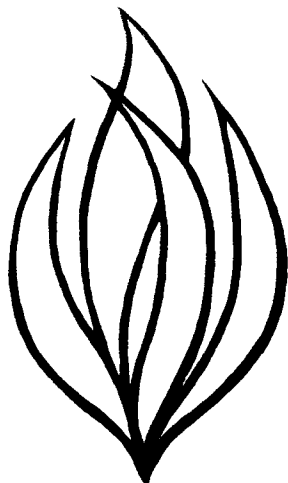
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# A Burning Fire

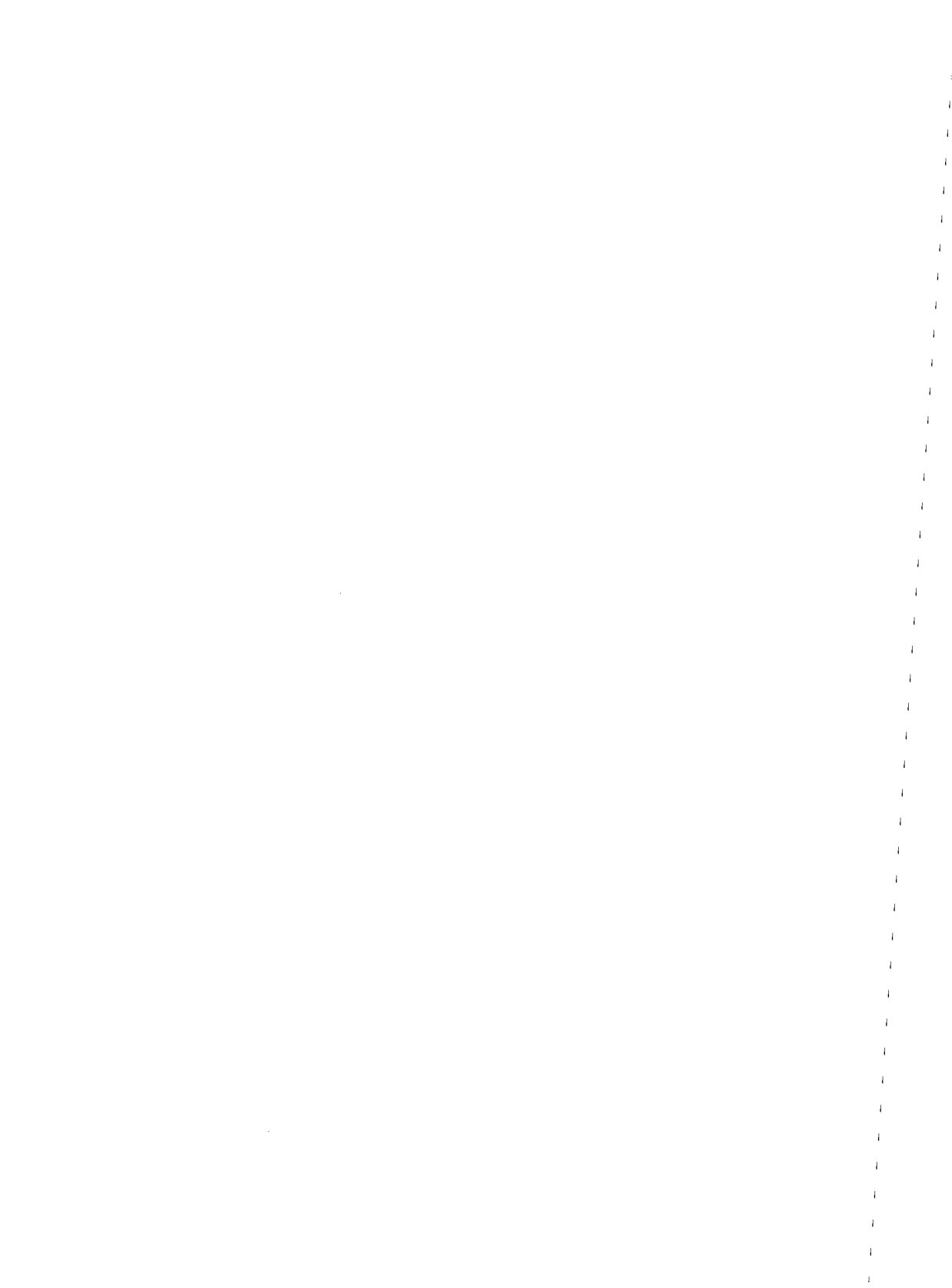


*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*



## **THIS ISSUE**

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# Coals of Fire

What does it mean to be a Christian? It means being Christlike and living as He would have us to live. Galatians 2:20, *"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."* First Peter 2:21, *"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps"* First Corinthians 11:1, *"Be ye followers of me, even as I am of Christ."*

This includes the development of a character, disposition and attitude like His. It involves conversation, outlook on life, hopes and ambitions. There are many sides to the character of Christ and they are all good, noble, worthy and perfect. Our lesson today considers one of them. First Peter 2:23, *"...when he was reviled he reviled not again; when he suffered he threatened not."*

When Christ was abused and wrongfully persecuted He did not return evil for evil, nor did He desire to do so. This is so different from the usual human reaction to strike back, give back as much or more than one has been forced to take, retaliate and get revenge. Getting even and setting the score seems to be mankind's norm.

Life is not too bad when all is going well, when we are being treated considerately, decently, kindly and even firmly but fairly. It is when it goes the other way that we face a character test. No credit is due when we suffer patiently because we have done wrong and are buffeted for it (First Peter 2:20). But when no wrong has been done, even good has been committed, and you are still berated, your motives impugned, you suffer from the lies and mistreatment by others, then your Christianity is strained (First Peter 2:20).

## Peace

Christians try to live at peace with everyone. Romans 12:18, *"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men."* Romans 14:9, *"Let us follow the things that make for peace."* The Christian does not deliberately seek conflict. Conflict has always been the state between the obedient and disobedient. *"Beware when all speak well of you..."* (Luke

6:26). A godly life will produce persecution (Second Timothy 3:12). But when it comes, how do we take it? What will be the effect upon us? What shall we do? Considering how some people are, it is good that they are against you. But what is our reaction toward them?

Consider our Lord, His behavior and attitude. Matthew 5:11,12, *"Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."* Matthew 5:43-47, *"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 rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?"*

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 a thief, or as a busybody in other men's matter. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God on this behalf."* Romans 12:14, *"Bless them which persecute you: bless and curse not."* Romans 12:17, *"Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men."* Romans 12:19-21, *"Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."*

### **Not Avenge**



Notice Paul mentions vengeance and avenging ourselves. To avenge is to justly punish the evildoer. Vengeance is the punishment justly administered. It is not evil of itself. The right to avenge and administer punishment belongs to God. First Thessalonians 4:6, *"because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified."* We are not to devise our own means of punishment even when we recognize the justification of punishment. This means we are not to take authority into our own hands, not take the place of God, but give place to Him and His wrath. We must recognize the difference between God's righteous vengeance and man's personal vengeance. While the Christian is not a pacifist toward all foes, he operates according to God's will and within the avenues God has provided for his defense and protection against evildoers.

God's vengeance will result in justified punishment. Man's revenge is getting even, seeking to harm because you have been harmed, paying back in kind as has been received, retaliating, giving evil for evil.

God's vengeance is an exercise of justice and divine wisdom. Man's revenge is a demonstration of hatred and the desire to hurt because you have been hurt. The motives are different as well as the goals.

Even now in this life God has revealed various avenues of vengeance that He uses. Civil government is one instrument of such power (Romans 13:3,4). We are not to take the law into our own hands, but the exercise of civil power to punish is ordained of God. Parental government is another avenue of God's power. Discipline in the church is yet another. While this is never a pleasant process, it is designed and commanded by God. It cannot be ignored lest the guilty think evil is good, and all be guilty of displacing rather than giving place to God's wrath. Actions of government, the home and the church ought never be to inflict harm, retaliation and injury per se, but administered out of respect for God and His way of avenging the violation of His Word.

Futhermore, those who die with unforgiven sins will suffer God's vengeance for eternity. Second Thessalonians 1:8,9, *"In flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."* But we are not to seek revenge nor assume authority that is not granted us. We are to

obey God in this matter.

### **Good for Evil**

Instead, we ought be willing to give our enemies what he may need, whether it be food, drink or whatever is to his benefit. To simply refrain from seeking revenge is only half the battle and half the victory. Overcoming evil with good is our goal. By doing good, if there is any degree of goodness within the one who has done us wrong, such a course may bring them to be ashamed and turn from their evil. It may not always work that way. But this is what it means to heap coals of fire on their heads. Goodness may even melt the enmity he has for you. At least, it will deprive him of being able to say evil against you justifiably. Reread First Peter 3:14-16 and consider Titus 2:8, *"Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you."* To seek to inflict revenge so as to harm is to be overcome of evil. By doing good we overcome evil with good.

Who benefits most when goodness and kindness is done? Revenge turned Joab into a merciless, rebellious and blood-letting man filled with hatred and betrayal even of friends. Samson got revenge but destroyed himself in the process. Even if revenge may cause suffering to your enemy, the one filled with a vengeful spirit is always a loser. When goodness is given even when evil has been received, the giver of goodness is always the victor. David, a victim of Saul's jealousy and rage, could have killed Saul on more than one occasion. But he chose to serve him well and spare him, remaining loyal, even mourning Saul's death. He became the victor.

Joseph could have taken revenge on his brothers who sold him into slavery. He had the power. But he provided for them and their loved ones. He is known as the most Christlike character of the Old Testament. Returning good for evil is what God has done for us. Romans 5:8, *"But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."*

### **They Followed Christ**

See how the followers of Christ imitated Him in times of injustice. Peter and John were imprisoned for preaching the gospel. But they counted it joy to be counted worthy to suffer

for Him (Acts 5:41). Stephen, being stoned, prayed, *“Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”* (Acts 7:60). *“Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.”* (Romans 10:1). Second Timothy 4:16, *“At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.”* He said he counted his losses for Christ’s sake as gain (Philippians 3:7). It was for the furtherance of the gospel (Philippians 1:12).

Our supreme example is Jesus Himself. Luke 23:33-47 shows He was not bitter toward His enemies. Kindness was still within Him. He compromised not one truth, condoned no sin, stood unmovable in the will of His Father. His enemies could not turn His goodness into malice nor His beneficent spirit into wild anger and revenge. They maimed and broke His body, but not His spirit. Even His grief was not for Himself but for those who viciously mistreated Him. In His dying breath His words were prayers on their behalf. His actions were firm, His word unmistakable. But even as darkness fell over the earth at His death, His love even for His enemies allowed the soft light of the morning of righteousness and the dawn of hope fall upon lost and sinful humanity.

Our admonition is that we rise up and follow Him when the fiery darts of evil come our way. While it is easier said than done, whether it be words against us, deeds to malign us, distortions designed to deceive and destroy us, let not the truth be shaken within us, but with a renewed determination to stand firm in the right, seek that which is best for all, even those who seek to bring you to nothing, who deny the truth to which you are committed, and even defame His church to which you belong. Any other course of action or thought would be contrary to God’s will and will result in our own detriment.

† † † † †

### **A Kinder and More Gentle Church**

Many brethren need to work harder along this line than is presently evidence among us. Standing steadfast does not require being mean and ugly. Some have never learned this. JB

# ***Lessons From Nebuchadnezzar***

Character study is one of the profitable methods of gleaning the message of God, learning the kind of person we ought and ought not to be. Generally, we cite those godly people as those from which to learn. Certainly, those are the ones we are to imitate. But the record of those less godly, even wicked, can teach us. From them we can learn what traits of character to avoid. A study of Nebuchadnezzar is of considerable historical interest, but he was not a commendable kind of person, although one of history's more notable ones.

His career was marked with personal boldness, power, eccentricities, and even a period of insanity. God has seen fit to show us something of the man in the inspired Scriptures because of his relationship to the people of God and an important period of history in the unfolding of God's scheme of redemption for man.

Nebuchadnezzar was the son of the founder of the great Babylonian empire. This empire eventually became world-wide under Nebuchadnezzar. Until that time no nation had achieved power on its equal. This man was the head of the Babylonian forces that conquered and destroyed the land of Canaan and the city of Jerusalem, taking its inhabitants into a period of captivity. He was able to defeat another major world power of his day, Egypt. He built a kingdom so rich and prominent that estimates of either his wealth or power are without calculation.

## **At Jerusalem**

Nebuchadnezzar's capture and destruction of Jerusalem was one of the most devastating ever recorded. It was without doubt one of the darkest moments in the history of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Under his guidance and direction the city was not only brought to starvation, but eventually plundered, disgraced, humiliated, mercilessly abused, its inhabitants removed and the city burned. The sacred places in Jerusalem were especially his targets. The learned and valuable people of the land were removed first, leaving only the least and those considered nothing much more than rabble. With some of

the very implements and tools that the priests of Israel used to worship God Nebuchadnezzar engaged in the most riotous and blasphemous behavior in order to desecrate that which was holy to Israel.

At the height of his reign, however, he was subjected to strange and astonishing dreams, as recorded in Daniel. One such dream was God's forecast of the coming of His spiritual kingdom, the establishment of the church of Christ (Daniel two). Daniel interpreted that dream to depict four kingdoms, Babylon being as a head of gold of a awesome image. Three other kingdoms were to follow. In the days of the fourth empire God would establish His kingdom. These kingdoms were Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. In the days of the Roman empire came the Lord and the beginning of the church, God's kingdom, on the day of Pentecost.

### **His Dreams Continued**

But there was another very disturbing and distressing dream he had that was also interpreted by God's prophet, Daniel. It had to do with Nebuchadnezzar personally (Daniel four). It foretold of his overthrow by his enemies, at least temporarily. He was forewarned how he would be treated as a beast of the field and would survive by eating grass. Such a thought was a humiliation beyond anything this monarch could imagine.

A closer look at the character of Nebuchadnezzar, both from the Bible and secular records, shows he was a public and notorious idolater by making, worshipping and commanding others to worship his idols and images (Daniel three). It was his passion for his idols that caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to be cast into the fiery furnace when they refused to obey his orders to bow before his gods. His wrath was so inflamed that he caused the furnace to be heated seven times hotter than usual in order to punish these children of Israel. As we see this man of great worldly power, we also see a man who paid honors to senseless and powerless images of gods of his own making.

Nebuchadnezzar is known in history as a man of relentless cruelty. His victories were accomplished through a reign of terror. Those who fell before him were treated unmercifully. This is evident in certain Biblical notes, such as the murder of the sons of Zedekiah before his own eyes, and then putting out the eyes of Zedekiah (Second Kings 25:7). Was this not also evident

in casting the three Israelites into a fiery furnace? Was not the siege of Jerusalem evidence of his inhumane treatment of others? Such was characteristic of his actions.

History records that Nebuchadnezzar, somewhat like Alexander the Great that came centuries after him, had an insatiable desire for power and an inordinate ambition for personal glory. He was never satisfied with what he had conquered but always wanted more and more. He drove his armies relentlessly until victory upon victory that brought him glory was accomplished. When one considers how much good can be accomplished when people turn such ambitions in noble and righteous directions, we are all made the more sorry that Nebuchadnezzar so wasted this talent that could otherwise have been so commendable.

### **His Pride**

As we learn in Daniel 4:30, Nebuchadnezzar was an exceptionally proud and haughty man. Of all his gods, he considered himself the greatest god of all. He prided himself for what he had done, and gave no credit to anyone or anything else for his victories. He was void of any comprehension that the true God of heaven was superior to him. He was a person of a big "I" and a little and insignificant "you."

God humbled Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4:33ff), exactly as Daniel had interpreted his dream. He was allowed to be subject to others, obviously losing his authority and grip over his kingdom. He had to live out of doors, eat grass, and was despised by all. His was a loss of friends, prestige and power; the very things that meant so much to him. In a degraded and humiliated state he was deprived of human association. When we consider the kind of man he was, we are inclined to agree that he had earned and deserved whatever evil that befell him.

But God allowed his humiliation to be temporary until it accomplished God's purposes. These things continued until this once proud monarch was brought to his knees and forced to recognize the true God of heaven. No longer did Nebuchadnezzar claim such glory as he had done, but began to attribute greatness to God. Indications are that this man was sincere in a penitent and reformed attitude and action of life. Nebuchadnezzar might well be classed alongside others of the Bible that once walked the way of destruction, and later removed his blinders and saw the light.

## Four Lessons

We can learn at least four significant and applicable lessons from what we know about this man of long ago. First, God is the only true and living God. The world is not left untouched by the power and direction of God. We do not always know how God manages things, but we have His word that He oversees the affairs of men through His providence. Regardless of what takes place in the world, God is not removed from His throne. Even the events surrounding Nebuchadnezzar were used by God to bring His saving plan closer to a reality through Jesus Christ.

Second, we see the folly of pride and self-glory. In the Bible we read of several such people whose pride brought about their ruin. Consider Haman, in the book of Esther, who wanted to destroy Mordecai but who was hanged on the very gallows he intended to use to hang Mordecai. Herod in the New Testament fell victim to his pride as he considered himself as a god and was brought to disease and death. Did not Adam and Eve fall victim to the temptation to be more than what they really were and violated God's commands? Was that not an appeal to vainglory? Proverbs 16:18, *"Pride goeth before destruction; and a haughty spirit before a fall."*

Third, we are impressed with the value of divine favor. We cannot defy God and succeed. What "success" we think we achieve is but a temporary and fleeting earthly gain that must perish. Real prosperity belongs to those who are rich toward God (Luke 12:21). Even if we gain the whole world, but lose the soul, we have made a bad bargain and suffer great loss. Even if all the world be at our feet, when we are not right with God we are not right.

Fourth, from a survey of the life of this man, Nebuchadnezzar, we see the value of humility. When one humbles himself before God we see God's loving mercy and blessings extended to him. The humiliation of the proud can be the means of exaltation. It can bring them to an awareness of matters that really matter that they otherwise have never given proper consideration. God must have seen even in Nebuchadnezzar a potential of qualities that were admirable if only they could be turned into a more productive direction. Everything indicates that Nebuchadnezzar learned some of these lessons quite well with the experiences that came his way and the words of God that he heard from the Lord's great prophet, Daniel. While we cannot go so far as to say that Nebuchadnezzar will be among those in heaven, for this

would be saying more than the Bible reveals, we can see a distinctive turn in the man. This we can commend to all who are out-of-step with righteousness.

How thankful we can be that the same God that dealt with that monarch of old is still God of all. He even extends His mercy toward us through His Son, Jesus Christ. How wise we would show ourselves to be to recognize our need and come to Him so that we may be blessed by Him.

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## **A Sorrow Not To Be Regretted**

We shall discuss sorrow with special notice of one kind of sorrow. Sorrow seems to be an inescapable part of human existence. Because this is true heaven becomes all the more attractive. There will be no tears nor sorrow, no sickness nor dying, no mental and physical pain and agony. No more will the saved suffer disappointment and loss of any kind.

When sorrow strikes it is an unwelcome intruder. We dislike having to endure it. But there is a sorrow that we can experience that is not to be regretted even though most sorrow is regrettable.

Second Corinthians 7:8-11, *"For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent; for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance; for ye were made sorry after a godly manner that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter."*

**In Corinth**



These words were written to the church in Corinth, a church established by the preaching of Paul. Having come from Macedonia into Greece, he reasoned in the synagogues, teaching Jews and Gentiles (Acts 18). His work met opposition and he was driven from the synagogue. But he went next door to the house of one named Justus and continued his preaching. His efforts met with success (Acts 18:8), and he remained there for a year and six months, *"teaching the word of God among them."*

After Paul left Corinth Apollos came and watered (not watered down) what Paul had planted, having already been taught the way of the Lord more perfectly by Acquilla and Priscilla. He used his ability of eloquence to help the church grow.

After the departure of Apollos the church was beset with a series of severe and church-shaking problems. There was division, a factious spirit, licentiousness, a lack of love, immorality among the members, an abuse of the Lord's Supper, the misuse and misunderstanding of the miraculous gifts, envy, and other kinds of disorderly conduct. Not much was being done among them to correct the problems. It took a letter from Paul to set before them the truth they were supposed to follow. This letter is known to us as First Corinthians.

### **Stern and Severe**

A study of First Corinthians reveals the letter to be one of rebuke, stern in tone, severe and right to the point in the issues involved. Some today would have accused Paul of lacking love to write in such fashion. The letter was filled with things to do and things not to do. There were instructions how to handle the problems and the problem makers. The condemnation of evil was forthright and absolute. Obviously, the Holy Spirit thought the occasion called for hard words and strong, disciplinary action. In that letter Paul did not hesitate to move against sin in the church in a definitive fashion. He did not just condemn sin generally, but much more. He condemned specifically the mind and manners of the Corinthian brethren that were wrong.

But there was something that bothered Paul. Having no desire to "skin the brethren," but having the duty to correct their evil, he pondered how those brethren would react upon receiving his words. Would they only rebel against the truth all the more? Some do that when truth is brought against their sins. Or would

they respect the truth, his apostolic authority, and give heed to what he wrote to them? Of course, he hoped for the latter response.

For some time he waited for word from Corinth. Meanwhile, he continued his preaching from Ephesus to Troas and into Macedonia. In time, Titus, who had taken the letter to Corinth, came to him with the report of their reaction to his apostolic directions.

### **The Good Reaction**

Titus reported that the vast majority of the church accepted what he had said with a good spirit. A few rebelled, but certainly not the bulk of the congregation. They were not intensified in their error, nor defiant. Rather they grieved over their sins that Paul had noted. They purged out the old leaven, even withdrawing from the disorderly, and showing evidence of correcting the matters wherein they erred. Paul was therefore comforted by this report and rejoiced over their attitude toward correction and their determination to follow truth.

Then Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, wrote what we call Second Corinthians. While in this epistle he dealt somewhat with the rebellious that remained, the letter for the most part is filled with encouragement, congratulations for their successes, and urgings to continued steadfastness. This kind of letter was more pleasant to write and more pleasant to receive.

In chapter seven Paul pleaded with brethren to receive him. He longed for a place in their hearts. He was proud of the church in Corinth and desired that they also have a concern for him as he went about preaching the gospel. Of course, Paul was an apostle and it was far more important for Corinth to accept Paul and his teaching. His words were words of authority.

### **He Caused Sorrow**

Then he spoke of sorrow, yea, two kinds of sorrow. One kind was a sorrow not to be regretted. Whereas his former letter had been rather forceful and uncompromising and the truth therein cutting into the decayed matter of sin in their midst (Hebrews 4:12 teaches that the Word of God will do just that), he was not happy to have caused them sorrow. He was sorry they had to suffer sorrow as they did. But he was not sorry he had so

written. He was sorry it had been necessary to write in that fashion. He was sorry they had suffered grief and shame because of what he had said. But while he was sorry about that, he was also very glad.

He was sorry he had to expose their sins. It is never a joy to cause uneasiness, to provoke discomfort and disturbance in the minds of others. It is no pleasure to produce a sense of guilt, disgrace and humiliation. Nathan did not relish the opportunity to tell David, *"Thou art the man."* John the Baptist did not gloat over his rebuke of Herod and Herodias. But sometimes such things are necessary (Second Timothy 4:1-4). Reproving and rebuking are involved in preaching the Word. Is it not obvious that with many there is far too much of an attitude of pacification toward sin and compromise with sinners?

Nobody in his right mind would deliberately create sorrow unless there was a far more beneficial goal to be reached. Paul loved these brethren enough to inform them of matters they needed to know. He was willing to risk his acceptance by them to accomplish the salvation of them. They could not continue as they were doing and then go to heaven after this life. He knew that and they needed to know that.

He was sorry, but he was glad he had made them sorry because they became sorry for their sins. This sorrow provoked them to repent and get right with God. Second Corinthians 2:2, *"For if I make you sorry, who then is he that maketh me glad, but the same which is made sorry by me?"* How could anybody regret causing sorrow that led a lost soul to be saved?

### **Two Kinds of Sorrow**

There are two kinds of sorrow. There is godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. One may well be sorry for his sins and that sorrow not be a godly sorrow. He may just be sorry he got caught and sorry he has caused himself so much trouble. We have seen people like that, haven't we? They were not sorry of the sort that they wanted to cease their wrongdoing. Such people are not sorry enough to change and do better. Judas was sorry for having betrayed Christ, but his was a worldly sorrow. Rather than appealing to the Savior for forgiveness he chose the coward's way and hanged himself.

But one can be sorry for his sins and this sorrow lead him to repent, seek forgiveness and do better and be better. Peter sinned when he denied Christ. He went out a wept bitterly. Who

can deny he was sorry? But of what sort was his sorrow? Does not his life thereafter show us his was a godly sorrow? He turned again and gave his all into the service of the Christ.

It is this godly sorrow that we ought not regret. Repentance is essential for salvation (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30). That which leads us to do what must be done in order to be saved, although it be painful, is not to be regretted. We have never heard of a painless way to inform others they are lost and doomed for hell unless they turn. We have heard and seen many who were aroused, disturbed, and even angered at first, but who were made sorry to the extent they repented and obeyed the Lord in baptism.

Romans 2:4 teaches, "*...that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance.*" When one realizes the goodness of God, and then becomes aware of his sins against God (and all sin is against God), he is cut to the heart (as on Pentecost) and is made sorry. His sorrow, and his realization of his offence against God, causes him to turn to God and be saved. His godly sorrow is never regretted, but is recognized as that for which one can be humbly grateful.

Our sorrow for sins can never equal the sorrow our Lord bore for our sins on the cross. But our faith, plus obedience to repent, confess Christ, and be baptized into Christ can wash us clean by the saving blood of Christ. How glad we are then that we have been made sorry!

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## ***Sin as Seen In Judas***

Salvation has an appeal and beauty only to those who first realize that they are lost and need to be saved. Many do not obey the gospel and come to enjoy salvation because they never have accepted the fact that they are lost and on their way to an eternal hell. They are undisturbed, content as they are, satisfied and really resist being bothered. Nonetheless, whether they accept it or not, they are lost.

Paul teaches that all have sinned (Romans 3:23), and none are righteous (Romans 3:10). This includes us all. Sin is a

transgression of God's law (First John 3:4), and we are guilty of sin because we have all sinned (Romans 5:12). Because sin is subtle and deceptive many are not convinced of its destructive power. But this is that which separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). If only mankind could be convinced that the wages of sin is death, separation from God eternally (Romans 6:23)! Sin is far worse than most consider it.

## **Judas**

The name of Judas is synonymous with evil, betrayal and sin. He certainly committed a terrible deed by betraying more than just a friend, more than just another man, more than just an innocent person, but the perfect Son of God. He sold Him to His enemies for thirty pieces of silver, but what he actually sold was his own soul. It proved worse than he ever imagined.

*"Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? See thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called The field of blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by the prophet Jeremy saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value, and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me." (Matthew 27:3-10).*

In another account we read, "Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was a guide to them that took Jesus. For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity, and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem, insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldema, that is to say, The field of blood. For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let not man dwell therein, and his

*bishoprick let another take.” (Acts 1:16-20).*

### **No Contradiction**

Skeptics have pointed to these two passages in their attempts to discredit the Bible and said they are contradictory. A contradiction exists only when both accounts cannot be true. It is not a contradiction simply where the two accounts do not report exactly the same things. One may report something the other does not, but so long as both could be true there is no contradiction. These accounts are not contradictory but complementary to each other.

One says Judas bought a field and the other says the priests bought the field. The simple explanation is that the priests used Judas' money to buy the field.

One says Judas hanged himself and the other says he burst asunder in the midst. There is no reason both could not have occurred. He hanged himself and either remained there until decay was sufficient for his body to tear apart, or the rope could have broken and his body fallen and he burst asunder.

Matthew says the prophet was Jeremiah when actually the prophet was Zechariah. There is only one Hebrew letter difference between the two names and there may have been an error by the copyist. Most likely, since Jeremiah was the first book in the Jewish arrangement of the prophets his name is used to denote the prophetic books. None of the apparent difficulties are hard to explain. There is no contradiction and there is nothing herein to shake out faith in the infallibility of the Bible. But more importantly, there are lessons to learn about sin and its consequences.

### **Consequences Are Worse**

Sin is always worse than we figure it will be. All sin is against God. When Joseph refused to be seduced by Potiphar's wife, he said he refused because he would not sin against God (Genesis 39:9). His sin would have been against Potiphar, his wife, himself, but more importantly, it would have been against God.

Moses warned the two and one half tribes that if they failed to keep their promises to the other tribes after crossing Jordan that it would be a sin against God (Numbers 32:23). When David was confronted with his sin of adultery with Bathsheba by the prophet Nathan he confessed that he had sinned against God

(Second Samuel 12:13). Yes, many others suffered because of his sin, but his sin was worse than he figured because it was against God. When Ananias and Sapphira lied concerning their contributions Peter said they had sinned against the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3). Sin is not just against other people or self, but against the Almighty Creator, Sustainer and Judge.

The consequences of sin are worse than we figure them to be at first. Adam's sin proved far worse than could have been imagined. By the transgression of Adam and Eve sin entered the world (Romans 5:12). Cain's punishment for murdering Abel was more than he felt he could bear (Genesis 4:13). Judas may have figured that Jesus would find a way to escape from His enemies and not suffer as He eventually did; certainly not be slain. This is not unreasonable to think because Christ had escaped the hands of potential captors earlier (Luke 4:29,30).

On "skid row" in most any large city there are men and women who once were respectable, prominent, successful in the affairs of the world. They never figured that social drinking could bring them to their degraded state. Those who use drugs have too late recognized how they have damaged their bodies and minds, and even destroyed the future of children they may produce, because of their foolishness in using drugs. It is all worse than we ever figure it would be. The lives of young and old alike are scarred with damage, regret, shame, disgrace, destruction of self-esteem, because they sinned, but figured sin would not be as bad as it really is. It is always more destructive than we can consider. Yes, sin pays. It pays sometimes in a few moments of pleasure and gain. But the eventual and final wages of sin is eternal separation from God unless forgiven.

The law of sowing and reaping teaches that we reap not only what we sow, but more than we sow. Hosea 8:7, *"For they have sown the wind and they shall reap the whirlwind."*

## **No Escape**

Again, Judas shows you cannot get away from your sins. You do reap what you sow (Galatians 6:7,8). Moses said, *"Be sure your sins will find you out."* (Numbers 32:23). After David's sin was exposed he was warned that he would suffer within his own family. He lived to see such horrible evils among his own children. One son ravished a daughter. One son murdered the ravisher. Another son rebelled against his father. Another tried to take his throne when he was on his death bed but before he

died. He could not escape the violent consequences that sin produced for him.

Some of us may think we can sin in secret and not be found out. But Luke 12:2 teaches, *"For there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; neither hid that shall not be known."*

Who was it that accused Judas of his transgression? Did anyone point the finger of accusation at him or expose his misdeed? There was nobody but himself that did that. His own conscience gave him no peace. It tormented him into confessing his crime and guilt. It drove him to suicide. Friend, even if we escape being found out by others, we have to live with ourselves. Even if we can harden our hearts and consciences, we will someday stand before God in Judgment. *"For we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one may receive the deeds done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."* (Second Corinthians 5:10).

### **Not by Yourself**

Judas shows that you cannot undo your own sins by yourself. He brought back the money that he had received and admitted he had betrayed innocent blood. He even killed himself. But in spite of all of his agony and retribution, this alone could not and did not remove his sins. Judas repented in one sense, that is, he was sorry that he had been discovered and that the events that resulted turned out to be as bad as they proved to be. But unfortunately, he was not sorry in the right way. He was not sorry enough to seek forgiveness of the Lord. He thought that if he made things right by himself that it would be enough. How mistaken he was! Yes, one must attempt to right his wrongs, but there is more to covering our sins than that. We cannot remove our sins alone.

We need to think of the difference between the way Judas acted toward his sin and the way Peter acted toward denying the Lord. Both sinned. Both were sorry. One kind of sorrow produced forgiveness and the other only brought death. Peter repented to serve the Lord. But Judas only repented to destroy himself. Paul wrote of the two kinds of sorrow in Second Corinthians 7:10, *"For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of, but the sorrow of the world worketh death."*

Even though man has a part to play in his own salvation (Acts 2:40), and must work out his own salvation (Philippians 2:12),



he cannot save himself by himself nor is it his prerogative to work out his own system of salvation. He must work the system that God has provided. We cannot be saved by our works of which we can boast (Ephesians 2:8,9), nor by our own righteousness (Titus 3:3-5). The only way to remove our sins is that they be forgiven (Romans 4:7). This involves and includes coming to Christ. That is the provision God has made. There is no other way (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). Christ is the author of salvation (Hebrews 5:9), and He came into this world for the very purpose of saving mankind from sin (First Timothy 1:15).

### **Forgiveness**

There is no sin too grave, dark or sinister that cannot be removed by taking advantage of the grace of God (Romans 5:20). Even as degrading as was the sin of Judas, he could have been forgiven if he had sought forgiveness from the proper source. So can you and I be forgiven. By putting our faith in Christ, repenting of our sins with a godly sorrow, confessing our faith in Christ and being baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, we can walk before Him and in the light as is He, and be forgiven, have hope, be assured that heaven will be our eternal home. We need not be the captive of Satan and the sufferer eternally for our sins. As bad as sin certainly is, and it is worse than we think, because of God and His Son, we can be saved from its wages.

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### **A Kinder and More Gentle Nation**

President George Bush has spoken of making our nation a kinder and more gentle nation. Seeing the violence, greed, prejudice and bitterness that abounds in the land, we sincerely hope his goals are realized. We need a kinder and more gentle nation.

That which will produce this desirable quality among us the gospel of Christ, heard, believed and obeyed. The awesome task resting upon us is to make sure this glorious gospel is proclaimed. The benefits are immeasurable. JB

# **Tomorrow: The Devil's Weapon**

Mark 10:17-22 tells the story of the rich, young ruler who came to Christ asking the important question, "*Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?*" Upon being told to sell his possessions and give to the poor, and because of his obvious attachment to his wealth, the man went away sorrowful. He came close to being saved, but not all the way.

Matthew 25:1-3 tells the story of the ten virgins awaiting the coming of the bridegroom and the marriage celebration. Five had made adequate preparation and entered into the feast, but five others, although they had made some preparation, had not prepared sufficiently and were refused entrance. They almost did enough but not quite.

Felix and Agrippa (Acts 24:24-27; 26:28) had opportunity to obey the gospel and enjoy salvation. But for one the convenient season never came and the other was merely almost but not altogether saved.

There are many things about these stories that are different, but there is one theme in them that is similar and leaves us cold and disappointed. We have an unanswered longing on their behalf and wish that someone could take action for them, recalling for them that significant moment in their lives when they could have prepared to meet God. Their refusal and postponement strikes us with sadness and emptiness, realizing their present hopelessness. They could have been counted among the saved, but they let the opportunity come, and pass them by, and did not take advantage of what was offered them. They all seemed to be obsessed with the idea that there was plenty of time yet for them to do what they must do.

## **A Fleeting Interest**

In these three people we have examples of people who had some interest in Christ and possessed a momentary conviction. But like an aircraft zooming through the clouds, emerging for just a moment into the brilliant rays of the sun only to be lost again amidst the overcast, these people appeared for a moment in the light of opportunity, then disappeared again and forever

away from the rays of hope.

One of the most effective weapons in the arsenal of the devil to deceive man is the plea that man has plenty of time. There is a fictitious story of three evil spirits standing before Satan. Satan asked, "Who will go and persuade men to accomplish their own ruin and how will you do it?" One said he would tell man there is no heaven. But Satan concluded that the goodness of God cannot be hidden. Another said he would tell mankind there is no hell. But Satan knew that justice demands both reward and punishment and thinking people would not accept that plea. A third said he would simply tell man, "There is heaven and there is hell and preparation must be made. But there is no hurry about it. There is plenty of time yet."

### **What A Lie!**

Nobody could tell you a more deadly lie than to leave you with the impression you have plenty of time to be saved. Two boys were walking across a frozen river on ice. But the portion on which they stood broke away from the bank and began drifting toward the center of the current. One jumped quickly to more solid footing. The other delayed and hesitated, only to be carried into the deep cold waters and to his death.

He was going to be all that a mortal should be- tomorrow.  
No one should be kinder or braver than he- tomorrow.  
A friend who was troubled and weary he knew  
Who'd be glad of a lift and who needed it, too;  
On him he would call and see what he could do- tomorrow.

Each morning he stacked up the letters he'd write- tomorrow.  
And thought of the folks he would fill with delight- tomorrow.  
It was too bad indeed, he was busy today  
And hadn't a minute to stop on his way.  
"More time he'd have to give others," he'd say- tomorrow.

The greatest of workers this man would have been- tomorrow.  
The world would have known him had he seen- tomorrow.  
But the fact is he died and faded from view  
And all that he left here when living was through  
Was a mountain of things he intended to do- tomorrow.

Tomorrow is like a chain that binds people to some

loathsome habit. It is a barred and bolted door shutting people from their dreams. It is the epitaph of graves of those who failed and came short of life's goals. It is a downward path that leads us to the land of regret; a word engraved over the realm of the lost; a slumber that paralyzes the energies of men; the call that beckons men to forsake duty. It is as a sword of destruction upon which we fall; as a word of the tempter and deceiver of mankind.

### **Now is the Time**

Jesus said, John 9:4, "*We must work the work of him that sent me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work.*" His words inspired the sentiments of the song, *Work for the Night is Coming*. The night is coming and now is the day, the time of opportunity. If we have not worked in the day we are hopelessly lost. If we refuse the opportunity to be saved, it may never return to us again.

The young are so susceptible to this deception. They live at a period of life when all seems to be in the future and life unending. But what guarantee do even the young have for another day? James says life is as a vapor that appears for a little time and vanishes away (James 4:13ff).

Do we realize that on the other side of the world, even as you read these words, there are weapons that can terminate our earthly existence before we can even know it is upon us? Our life is uncertain. The only certain fact about life is that it shall end. Ecclesiastes 9:5, "*For the living know that they shall die...*" Doubtless, Solomon had such in mind when he instructed the young to remember their Creator in the days of youth (Ecclesiastes 12:1). The present is all that any of us can claim.

We probably do not consider the blessing of time as we ought. There are two ways of considering time. (1) As water from a fountain, forming an endless stream in abundance, giving pleasure, something with which to play and be enjoyed, or (2) as men adrift on the high seas, or crossing a desert, who realize that every drop of water they have is life. Someone has suggested that time is the substance from which life is made. Poor Richard's Almanac included, "Doth thou live life? Then do not squander time; for that is the stuff from which life is made." We can hardly place a proper value on time. It is not to be wasted, but rightly used.

## **Make the Most of It**

William Jennings Bryan, one of world's greatest orators, won nomination of his part for the presidency three times around the turn into this twentieth century. It is generally accepted that his golden speeches before huge crowds carried the day for him. After one such speech one commented that he had probably spoken even more brilliantly to smaller groups than his speeches at the conventions. But then Bryan added, "That may well be true. But the convention was my opportunity and I made the most of it." Like him, we must appreciate the value of now. Now is the day open to us. Hosea 10:12, *"Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground; for it is the time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you."* Shall we wait too long to appreciate the present until the blessings of opportunity pass us?

A prisoner awaiting execution was the son of a poet who had tried to show his son the Bible. But he had ignored his father. But in his last days he read, studied, prayed and found what life could have been. His last words were, "My regret is beyond my power to express. All once looked forward with hope and joy to what I was to become. Now every mother and father prays their child will never be what I have become. I did not seize my opportunity when it was before me."

Carlyle wrote, "Cherish what is dearest while you have it near you, and wait not till it is far away." But more important than any writing of man are words of divine inspiration. Ephesians 5:16, *"Redeeming the time..."* Second Corinthians 6:2, *"For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the day of salvation."* Hebrews 3:12,13,15, *"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today: lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin... While it is said, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation."*

## **We Have Now**

What is it that we have that is so valuable and precious? God offers us in our time those things which belong to our peace, especially our spiritual peace for the soul. We have an open door through which we are invited to pass that takes us into the

room of salvation and every spiritual blessing. Many before us have entered: those on Pentecost, the Samaritans, the Ethiopian, Lydia, Saul, Cornelius, the jailor, and countless others of whom we read in Scripture. Asking what they must do to be saved they were told to believe, repent, confess their faith and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. They did as taught and seized their opportunity while the hand of Jesus was still extended toward them.

This warning should sober us. Every rejection shortens the day of opportunity. Every refusal makes the heart less responsive to the call of God as given in the gospel. Astronomers tell us of heavenly bodies whose orbits draw them nearer and nearer toward each other. They approach the closest point and then turn away. Thereafter every second, minute and hour finds them further apart. So it is with mankind and response to God. We can draw nearer and nearer to Him. But delay, postponement, refusal to enter His service forces us to drift further and further away from God and to the soul's eternal damnation.

Today is the key to success; the ladder by which we can climb to heights sublime. Today is the sunlight that brightens the pathway of happiness. It is the sword with which we can smite temptation. It is as a voice that calls us from slumber that is otherwise fatal. Today is that which the redeemed recognized as their advantage and blended it with eternity.

Little wonder that Paul urged, *"Now is the accepted time... now is the day of salvation."* Psalm 119:57-60, *"Thou art my portion, O lord; I have said that I would keep thy words. I intreated thy favor with my whole heart; be merciful unto me according to thy word. I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments."* The golden moment of salvation is before us. It is here - now. Will you accept the invitation of Christ to come to Him, obeying His commands, and being added to the company of the saved? Why do you wait?

† † † † †



## **No Shortage, but Help Welcome**

Those who do not preach regularly probably do not fully realize the difficulty at times in knowing just what to preach next. Preachers, knowing their sermons must be Biblical, try to determine what is most needful at a given moment, what truths needs to be brought to remembrance, and he studies not only his lessons but must decide which lesson just when. It is not always that easy. There is vast material in Scripture to be sure, but which text, which topic at which time is not that easy to decide.



**JAMES W. BOYD**

This is where extensive Biblical reading is most helpful. But also ideas from sermon books, sermons others have preached, articles from brotherhood papers and other sources can be of real assistance. We need not think we must always be original, but Scriptural. I doubt if any of us are very original. After all, the gospel has been preached for twenty centuries. But serious study, and ideas from others, can help us arrange our material and know the best way to present it.

Next time you hear your preacher preach, you can be fairly sure he spent considerable time deciding just what to do at that time.

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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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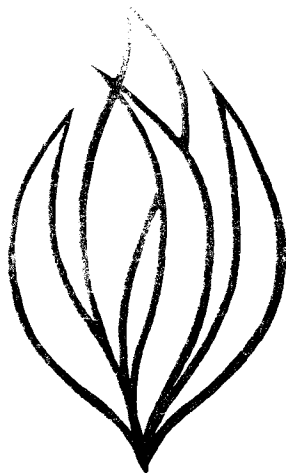
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# A Burning Fire



*"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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# ***The Work of a Preacher***

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."*

Mark 16:15, 16, *"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned."*

Romans 10:13-17, *"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! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of God."*

## **Proclaimer**

All of us have a duty to spread the gospel to everyone, but it is the preacher who is the public proclaimer of the Word. The work of a preacher is one that many of us who preach are hesitant to publicly discuss because we are so closely and personally connected with it. Some may assume you are promoting yourself and impugn your motives when you preach such a lesson. Some might accuse you of drawing attention to yourself, elevating yourself, defending yourself, and other such things. Yet, the work of a preacher is a Bible subject which many do not know and understand, even some who preach.

There are many good brethren who sincerely appreciate gospel preachers, but not everyone does in the world, or even in the church. None can realize the nature and seriousness of such a work more than those who have given their lives to the work. Being a preacher is not like other occupations where you punch a time clock, go to work, come home from work, time on, time

off, office hours, daily schedules, etc. This is said only to emphasize the difference in preaching from other occupations. Preaching is a way of life that dominates life, not only for the preacher but also his family if such he has. The work is constantly with you in everything you do or say, where you go, what you have. You are always a preacher, not just when in the pulpit. It is a work that, by its nature, cannot be regulated, compared or described like other honorable work. Many have not appreciated this fact as they ought.

### **His Authority**

Let us consider what the preacher is NOT. He does not have authority by virtue of preaching to rule the church. He is to preach with authority (Titus 2:15), but he does not make the decisions for the congregation nor should he be expected to do so. Elderships must assume this task. He, like other members, labors under the oversight of the eldership. While his advice and counsel may often be sought because of his study knowledge and experience, he is not the authority over the church. He is not a substitute or displacement of the eldership, nor should anyone expect him to discharge the duties of the eldership

### **No Substitute**

Neither is he a substitute for a working membership. Some evidently think so because they talk about the preacher “taking up the work.” Often this is what actually happens. While others sit by and let him “take up the work” because he has been “hired to work for us” and we can sit back, this is a mistaken concept of a preacher. He is not “hired help.” He is a brother in Christ serving in a specific and unique capacity. When he visits it is not the church visiting. He is not an errand boy for the congregation. It is not even his task as a preacher to organize, supervise and promote all the programs and plans of work for the church. He is not the congregation’s public relations man. Some churches look to the preacher to be everything from the janitor to the chairman of the building committee; from selecting who is to serve at the Lord’s table to ordering literature. This is not his work nor should it be imposed on him. Some must think because they have a preach they do not have anything to do. Little wonder many preachers suffer “burn out.”

## **Counsellor**

Preachers are often called to solve problems in people's lives. This is sometimes called counselling. He is not a professional counsellor, however. He is asked to help because of his knowledge of the Word and he is usually glad to be of whatever help he can be. It is a very frustrating role he is called upon to play, however. Too often his advice is sought but ignored, then he becomes the target of criticism when things do not work out happily. It is not uncommon that his assistance is solicited but it only brings him grief, false accusations, disappointments and criticism because many people do not want counselling or advice. They want somebody to side with them in every dispute and somebody to take their side and agree with them. When the preacher does not do this he is considered incompetent. As helpful as he might be along these lines, such is not his primary function.

## **Preach**

A preacher is to preach the Word. He is to bring glad tidings of salvation. This is his number one work. All else revolves around this. Every opportunity he has or can make he will preach and teach. Congregations should encourage him to do this and cooperate with him as he arranges to preach.

He is obligated before God to speak sound doctrine (Titus 2:1, 8, 15). He must preach the whole counsel of God, positively and negatively (Acts 20:27, 27). He is to keep that which is committed to his trust (First Timothy 6:20). He is to teach that others may also teach (Second Timothy 1:13). Second Timothy 4:1-5, *"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom, Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."*

## **His Life**

The preacher must guard his personal life and habits, financial

affairs and morals. He cannot be an effective preacher and live against what he preaches.

He must maintain a steady study of the Word he is to preach. When he does the study and research that is required, there must be prayer and meditation. It takes time; far more time than many realize. It takes some more time than others. Brethren should be patient and cooperative with him in this. Study and preach; preach and study. This is the heart of the task. The preacher's mind is never released from it nor should it be. Anything else he does, regardless of how demanding, must not be allowed to interfere with this. He cannot rely upon his oratorical ability, personality, humor, secular wisdom and such like. He must know the Word, preach the Word and live the Word. This is a consuming work mentally, emotionally, spiritually and very physically demanding.

### **Truth Offends**

Unhappily, he often finds the truth he preaches is offensive to some who hear him. This was true of Christ and His apostles. While this is to be expected, it is an unpleasant and disappointing experience. Yet, he cannot swerve from his commitment to the truth in order to accommodate any hearer. Often the same sermon that offends one will convict another. At no time does he dare apologize for the truth even though it may cost him his pulpit at a given place. He has to live before God and give answer to Him whether anybody approves of what he teaches or not. The aim of every faithful gospel preacher is to please God, not men (Galatians 1:10). At no time does he allow a desire to please and be accepted cause him to offend God. He is fortunate when he can please God and possibly a few men at the same time.

### **Regarding Error**

His preaching must be balanced. He must bring to light all truth and its applications. Failure to preach the positive and negative side is negligence. Exposing error is as much a part of preaching as declaring truth. No responsible preacher seeks to alienate anyone. He wants to win their hearts for Christ. He wants friends as much as the next person. But he is often criticized as if the truth he preaches, which some reject, originated with him. Some will praise him if they like what he

says, but tear him to pieces if they disapprove of other truth he declares. When we hear a preacher preach, the first question we ought to ask is, "Is it the truth?"

### **Meeting Opposition**

Preachers soon learn that most of his opposition will come from those who reject his message. Some will attack him personally because they do not want to admit they reject the truth he preaches. It is also possible that he preaches in such a manner that he offends needlessly. This he can and should avoid and correct when it is mentioned to him. But truth causes disturbance at times and uneasiness among those who do not want to conform to it. Preachers are the last in the church who want to cause problems because they are always the first to go when problems arise regardless of the cause or source of the problem. But he will not forsake his sacred task regardless of personal consequences for doing what a preacher must do. More often than not he must discharge his duty receiving bare minimum sustenance from brethren, but he does it.

Whoever preaches to you and for you, you better hope and pray he will teach you the truth regardless of the consequences to himself. Beware of that person who is looking out first of all for his own welfare! You better hope and pray that he has the courage to say what should be said and not just what tickles your ears. You better hope and pray that he will stand fast on the Word, by the Word, with the Word, proving his message from the Word. You better hope and pray he will never bow to the many pressures from within and without the church to alter, compromise, soften or otherwise tamper with God's truth to accomodate those who do not approve of it. While he must always try to improve his manner and method, take heed of his attitude, increase his knowledge and skills in doing his work more effectively, you better hope and pray that he will never bend or break beneath the discouragements and sacrifices that are imposed upon him, not only by those of the world, but as much by worldly, digressive and vindictive brethren, weak elderships, and a vocal but antagonistic liberal or human legalistic minority. Whenever you reach the point that you only want to hear what soothes and praises you, compare yourself with the word quoted from Second Timothy 4:3, 4.

Everybody knows, and the preacher is more aware of it than most anybody, that everyone will not approve of the preacher.

He is just another human being and has his personal peculiar characteristics like everyone else. Regardless of how fluent, scholarly, effective, kind or forceful he might be, there will be other qualities he may lack than some would prefer. He will not be perfect. Sensible preachers do not even try to please everybody because he knows he cannot. He wisely serves to please God, hoping others will serve to please God also. That is all the faithful gospel preacher seeks from anyone. He is gratified when his efforts are appreciated by faithful brethren.

### **God's Son**

We all do well to remember that God had but one Son, and He was a preacher. Preachers do not seek your praises, but your salvation. They ask not for your possessions, but fair support in leading you to live for the Lord. They seek not anything more than your life for Christ. There is no more noble and needed work on earth than preaching the gospel. I do not say that because I preach. I preach because I believe it is true.

Preachers have faults and shortcomings. If he does not realize it it will not be long before somebody reminds him of each one of them. But we need to concentrate not so much on the man as on the message of God the man preaches. Consider it; measure it by the Word; investigate it; believe it when proven true; obey it; and live by it everyday. Also help the faithful preacher defend it.

Probably never has there been a time when gospel preachers need the cooperation, encouragement and support as now. The onslaught of error runs rampant in and out of the church. Digression, liberalism, modernism, worldliness, indifference, rebellion, immorality, all kinds of "isms" leading people astray hold sway. Only the gospel can turn the tide and save the soul. It is the task of the preacher to preach it. Pray for him as he labors because he knows before the world is right side up it must be turned upside down. Usually he is trying very hard to fill his role. Know his work and help him do it.

† † † † †

When Peter said, "*Silver and gold have I none,*"  
the lame man knew he was a preacher.



# **Admonishing One Another**

Parents are taught to rear their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Paul said the things written aforetime were for our learning and admonition (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 10:11). Romans 15:14, *“And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able to admonish one another.”* We admonish each other in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Colossians 3:16).

To admonish means to instruct, counsel, warn, reprove, rebuke, teach, bring to mind what we may already know but that which needs to be ever brought before us.

## **The Text**

Second Peter 1:1-15, *“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Grace unto you, and peace be multiplied. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice though now for a season, if needs be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory; receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you, searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ, which was in them did signify, when it testified*

*beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow, unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into. Wherefore gird up the lions of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ, as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance, but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation."*

### **Peter Knew the Need**

See the old soldier of the cross, Peter, as he is about to lay down the armor and cross the river of death, entering into the joys of the Lord. His primary concern was the salvation of his brethren. He had lived a long and useful life in service to God, having fought many battles, known dangers, seen pitfalls. He felt keenly the need to admonish his brethren lest they forget certain principles by which they must live.

If Peter, guided by the Holy Spirit, knew the need of admonishing how much more should we also recognize the need? There is so much to distract us from Christian living and away from the pure, noble, upright life. There is so much in the world to tempt and deceive, draw away and entice. Peter wrote, First Peter 5:8, 9, *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour, whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."*

Some teach that a Christian cannot fall, but the Bible teaches no such thing. Admonitions are given to prevent falling away. Why would the writers of Scripture give admonitions against falling away if one could not fall anyway?

### **What Jesus Said**

John 15:1-6 is where Jesus presented Himself as the vine and we as the branches. Some braches, dead, worthless, unfruitful, were cut off and cast into the fire. Christ is the vine; God is the husbandman; and Christians are the branches. If the Christian does not bear fruit to the glory of God he is cut off and cast

away. Hebrews 3:11-15, *"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, but exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; while it is said, Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation."*

What have you produced for God? What are you producing now? What do you intend to produce in the future? When you are going to produce? We cannot produce ignoring worship, without prayer, study, righteous living, honesty, purity, liberal giving and doing good to others. We cannot fare sumptuously every day and neglect the needy. John 15:8, *"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit."* Producing good works is essential to salvation lest we be cast away.

### **Bought**

We are admonished by the reminder that we are bought by the blood of Christ. The church is composed of Christians. These are people who have been purchased by His blood (Acts 20:28). First Corinthians 6:20, *"Ye were bought with a price; ye are not your own."* First Peter 1:18, 19, *"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."* This means we are not left to live life as we see fit, but as God has taught. We need this daily reminder as we go through the activities of earthly existence.

### **Warned**

Is there not also the need to be warned of the deceitfulness of material things? Not many admit to being wealthy. But riches are a relative and comparative matter. Compared to the average person in the world Americans are wealthy. When we see the clothes, cars, vacations, luxuries, etc. that are in abundance among many (these things are not evil in themselves), we should not deny our material emphasis and material abundance.

But when we see how much is contributed to promoting the cause of Christ, we wonder if we are not near spiritual poverty.

How many would be willing to conduct the rest of the affairs of life on ten times their weekly contributions?

There is so much work to be done in fighting God's battles. This takes finances, energy and effort, time and thought. But the church's ability is often restricted, not because members do not have the money, but because members do not give the money. Have we ignored the apostolic warning and admonition above the love of money? First Timothy 6:9, 10, *"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 taught, Luke 12:15, *"Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."* How far removed are we from the ancient brethren of Laodicea who thought themselves rich because of an abundance of material things, but were in spiritual poverty (Revelation 3:15- 19)?

### **Enrolled**

The Bible teaches the Christian has his name enrolled in heaven. The Lord sent seventy disciples on a mission. They returned and made report, rejoicing over their power over demons. Luke 10:20, Jesus said, *"Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rejoice rather because your names are written in heaven."* There is genuine cause to rejoice when our names are written there on the page bright and fair.

In describing the judgment, John wrote, Revelation 20:15, *"And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast in the lake of fire."* But it is possible for us to have our names removed from the heavenly scroll. Exodus 32:33, Jehovah said unto Moses, *"Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book."* Psalm 69:28, *"Let them be blotted out of the book of the living and not written with the righteous."* Paul said brethren of Philippi had their names *"in the book of life."* (Philippians 4:3). But we are warned our names can be blotted from the book of life (Revelation 22:19).

God does not enroll those who do not confess and obey His Son. God will not keep on His roll those who are unfaithful to His Son.

All such Scriptures are written to admonish us. They do not say God is unable to save, cannot save or will not save when we meet His conditions. They do teach that we must pay attention and allow ourselves to be admonished, be fruitful, not neglectful of our duties, even after we have been baptized. Others before us have been cast out who were disloyal to God. We shall not be an exception if we follow the same deadly path.

## **Conclusion**

The sum of the matter is expressed in Second Corinthians 15:21, "*Jehovah is with you while ye are with him, and if you seek him, he will be found of you; but if you forsake him, he will forsake you.*" None could put it plainer or stronger. These truths do not discourage our service to God, but all the more encourage us to faithful service and to give heed to admonitions. Learning these admonitions, let us show love one toward the other and admonish one another.

† † † † †

## **Come and Help**

Acts 16:6-12, "*Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis, and from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia and a colony; and we were in that city abiding certain days.*"

This is an account of part of what we call Paul's second missionary journey. Paul, Silas and others were busy preaching

and strengthening churches in Lystra, Derbe, Phrygia and Galatia, doing a good work. They planned additional efforts in Asia and Bithynia, but the Lord forbade them working their plan. It was not because their plan was wrong, because they were carrying out the great commission. But it was because there was other work the Lord had for them to do which was more urgent at the moment. An opportunity was already cultivated and the time of harvest was nigh. God wanted them for a more productive work.

### **Come and Help**

At Troas Paul was informed by a vision what God wanted them to do. He heard a plea from a man from Macedonia, "*Come over... help us.*" The words "*Come... and help*" have a ring of urgency about them. They are words of pleading and recognition of limitations and the need for assistance. They express dependency and expectancy. Such words can and do arouse interest, compassion and action in people.

One of the most pathetic men I have known was a man less than forty years of age who was physically strong and had a good job, but he had been unfaithful to his wife, was back to drinking and his job was threatened because of his conduct. His debts were overwhelming him. He turned to me and said, "Please, help me." We found a way to help, beginning with his conversion. He overcame his problems and he and his family today, as I write this, are faithful in the Lord's church.

I recall visiting with an elder into a home of a young husband and wife who were having serious differences. They poured out their troubles and begged us to find a way to help. We offered what we could and tried our best. But both were too rigid in their views and would not resolve their differences, later divorcing. This was a very sad experience for the elder and me. But how I remember the cry for help.

Surely, the Lord used the plea to Paul that would come closest to touching his heart and the quickest way to bring action from him. "*Come... and help.*"

### **Help on the Way**

The plea of one caught in the swirling rivers of despair, dependence, hopelessness and helplessness is the cry for help. It is our duty to answer that call to the extent we can. Paul saw his

duty; answered the call; and help was soon on its way. How reassuring it is to know when there is a need that help is coming.

Some years ago the report was made of an elderly couple travelling through the desert of Utah who got off the highway and were lost. Search parties were sent out, but their water supply was soon depleted and death seemed imminent. Then a pilot in an airplane spotted their car and saw them nearby. He dropped water and supplies along with a note that said, "Help is coming." That note, as much as anything else, gave them strength to survive until help arrived. How fine it is when Christians have the spirit of helpfulness in their hearts and actions.

Jesus is our example of willingness to help. Matthew 15:22-28, He helped the woman whose daughter was vexed. In Mark 9:17-24 He helped one who was possessed with an evil spirit, releasing him from his burden. In Matthew 11:2-5 He helped so many and that which He was doing was used as evidence that He was the One that was prophesied to come. We are to follow in His steps, not being able to do the miraculous things He did, but having the same attitude and disposition to helpfulness that He demonstrated.

We may grow weary at times of being asked to help. But to whom does the cry to help come except those who can and will help? Only those whose heart can be touched will respond. Where else can those in need turn except to those who can and will help?

### **Paul Helped**

Paul heard the call. He could help. He was willing to help. He did help. He soon was preaching the gospel on the continent of Europe for the first time in history. Remembering how he helped, later he called upon his Philippian brethren to help two sisters in that good church to settle a dispute of some nature between them. They needed help and brethren were made to realize we ought to help each other.

Have not others helped us in life? Others have taken the time, money, energy, care and concern to see about us. Even where we are privileged to worship, somebody back there in the past cared enough to help get the work started. Can you count the ways God has helped you?

### **Help From God**

In First Samuel seven Samuel is recorded to have called Israel together at Mizpeh, but the Philistines took advantage of them and threatened an attack. Samuel called upon God for help and God rescued them. Samuel later *"took a stone and set it between Mizpeh and Shen and called the name of it Ebenezer saying, Hither hath the Lord helped us."* (First Samuel 7:12). We sing sometimes, "Here I raise my Ebenezer; hither by thy help I've come."

Who among us is not aware of God's help thus far in life? We have been dependent for food, shelter, clothing, care and God is the giver of every good gift (James 1:17). Psalm 33:20, *"Our soul waiteth for the Lord; he is our help and our shield."* Psalm 46:1, *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."* How many can acknowledge His help in times of sadness and tragedy, temptation and discouragement? Even in times of prosperity He is a source of help to keep us soberminded, thankful and humble. Seeing how He has helped us, cannot we be of the same mind to help others?

When cries for help come our way, how do we apply the Golden Rule? Do we really treat others as we would want them to treat us? To what extent do we manifest a Christlike helpfulness? Are we like the priest and Levite who went by on the other side, or the Samaritan who helped? Can we be content for the "Lazarus" nearby to have nothing more than crumbs from our table?

Sinners are crying for help and brethren often look the other way. Children need spiritual guidance and help. All that is available to God to be used in spreading the gospel is what He has entrusted to us. Who else will see that truth is proclaimed if we do not? Many may be robbing God and not giving as they ought, thereby keeping the saving gospel from the hearts of many. If we fail in our stewardship, if we heed not the cry to *"come and help,"* shall God be pleased with us in our comfort and luxuries of life?

### **A Continuing Call**

The Macedonian call is ever before us. We cannot be content to just "keep house for the Lord" while others are dying in sin. Not all can be helped because all do not want help. Not all will respond to help when offered. No one person or congregation can do everything alone. But this does not dismiss our responsibility to be busy doing what we are able to do.



The story is told by one of our brethren who was laboring in a foreign field, going from place to place, preaching almost constantly. Where the missionaries went the killing, hatred, stealing, etc. ceased. Churches were established. Lives were made better. Civilization became a reality as well as souls forgiven of sins and saved. One man who had heard the truth and obeyed it urged the preacher to come to his village. There was a limit what one man could do, however. With the duties already upon him and working night and day, with laborers so few, he simply could not physically make the journey. The native was greatly disappointed and turned away. But he turned back long enough to say, "When we stand before God in judgment and my people are condemned, I'm going to tell God on you."

When the gospel was taken to Scandinavian areas, one new convert turned to the preacher and asked, "Why did you not come sooner?"

Such questions rend the heart. Each of us should ask if somebody might not tell God on us. Somebody may wonder even when we go why we were so late in coming. It may be because too few of us are really converted to the task before us to see that the lost hear the Word that they might be saved. Within driving distance of many churches that are plentifully supplied there are states and counties where the gospel is unknown in its truth and simplicity. Do we turn a deaf ear to that? Or do we resolve that we shall devise ways and means compatible to truth to do whatever we can to answer the call that comes to us, *"Come... and help?"*

† † † † †

We hear more and more of churches that are having difficulty finding qualified men among them to serve as elders because they have failed to rear their children to be faithful. Scripture demands that while children are in his home they be faithful. We wish more parent would give more attention to properly guiding their house so they could be elders in the church.

# ***More on the Lord's Return***

We shall study from Second Peter chapter three as well as other passages. Anticipation of the Lord's return is at the heart of the hope of the Christian. But His return has been the target of both skeptics and speculators, those who disbelieve He will come again and those who see fit to predict when and the conditions involved when they have no such revelation from God. Both classes, skeptics and speculators, have existed even since New Testament days and the writing of Peter in this chapter deals with much of their error.

## **Promised Return**

The Lord said He would return (John 14:1-4). The angels declared, Acts 1:11, *"This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."* Paul said the Lord Himself shall be the One to descend (First Thessalonians 4:16).

Second Peter 3:1,2, Peter stated he was writing to remind his brethren of things they already knew but which they needed to keep in mind. Such things had been spoken before by the holy prophets and apostles.

Second Peter 3:3, 4, Peter mentions the existence of scoffers and skeptics. They lived then and they live now. It is always upsetting to godly people to hear the truth of God ridiculed and shunned, but the scoffers may not realize that their very existence goes to prove the apostolic prediction to be true. The scoffers held to a theory akin to what is called the uniformitarian theory that evolutionists uphold even yet.

Second Peter 3:5,6, Peter accuses such skeptics of willingly ignoring certain historical facts. They denied the power of the Word of God, the flood at the time of Noah as reported in Scripture. In our study we shall for a moment pass by verse seven and return to it later.

In verse eight Peter teaches that time is of no consequence to God in the performance of His promises. One day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day. What some skeptics might consider to be a default on a promise is nothing more than God fulfilling the promise when He sees fit. God has not revealed any timetable regarding the Lord's final return. For

one to fault God for not keeping His Word reflects ignorance on the part of the skeptic.

### **Promises Are Kept**

Furthermore, Second Peter 3:9 emphasizes that the Lord does keep His promises and is not slack toward them but rather longsuffering to mankind, not wanting anyone to perish, but preferring all to repent. What some have counted as slackness on the part of God is actually kindness and longsuffering on the part of God. It just shows how far afield from the truth those who wish to repudiate God's will can get.

Second Peter 3:10 takes note of such instances of skeptical ignorance, but also notes that their ignorance changes nothing. *"The day of the Lord will come..."* He will come *"as a thief in the night."* This means that He will come unannounced as to the specific indications and signs whereby one can know the time of His coming. Rather he will come unexpectedly except for the assurance that someday, in God's wisdom, He will come. The same teaching is stressed in other passages such as First Thessalonians 5:2; Matthew 24:36-39. As the Matthew record states, life will be continuing as usual just as it was in the time when the flood at the time of Noah came upon the wicked inhabitants of the world.

### **When He Comes**

Notice some of the events that are revealed that shall occur when the Lord returns (Second Peter 3:7, 10, 12). It will mark the end of the world with the greatest conflagration ever known because even the elements shall melt with fervent heat and the earth and the works therein shall be burned up. This either will or will not occur. Peter said by divine guidance that it will occur. Was he a false prophet? Do we deny what Peter wrote and repudiate the only religious authority known to mankind that has come from heaven, the Scriptures? This teaching strikes a death blow at the theory that calls for the Lord to establish an earthly kingdom upon His return because there will not be any earth for anybody to establish anything.

Second Peter 3:9 also teaches His return marks the end of man's probation. His last opportunity to get right with God will be gone. Salvation will be offered no more. Since *"the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation,"* (verse 15), the end of

that longsuffering is the end of that opportunity.

## **Resurrection**

Another event, not recorded in Second Peter three but in First Corinthians 15:20-26 is of importance. This fifteenth chapter emphasizes the reality of the resurrection, affirming the resurrection of Christ as the first fruits of all who die (verse 20). He is the forerunner and pledge of the harvest. His resurrection assures the resurrection of all mankind and is the guarantee of that resurrection.

Verses 21 and 22 note how sin and death came through Adam and transgression. But the resurrection and life came by and through Christ.

Verse 23 teaches the arranged order and plan by the Lord of that resurrection. Christ was raised first. Afterward, they that belong to Christ shall be raised. This passage deals with the resurrection of the righteous. It teaches that the righteous shall be raised at His return (First Thessalonians 4:13-18). Other passages that we shall soon consider teach that both the righteous and wicked shall be raised the same day and hour.

Verse 24 speaks of the end. Christ's return marks the end of things as was also revealed in Second Peter 3. But what is of tremendous significance to the child of God, the citizen in the kingdom of God, which is the same as the church of Christ, that kingdom shall be delivered to the Father. His return will not mark the setting up of His kingdom but the delivering up of His kingdom to God the Father. This marks the entrance into the eternal glory of heaven for the saints.

Christ is now ruling and reigning and is now King of kings and Lord of lords over His kingdom. He shall reign until He puts down all rule and authority and power. Verse 25 tells how long He will reign. All His enemies shall be conquered. The last enemy is death (verse 26) which shall be overcome with completeness with the resurrection from the dead of everyone. Certainly, we can understand how the resurrection marks the end of the rule and power of death. Christ reigns and shall reign until then, and that end will occur at His return. The same term of rule was announced by Peter in Acts 2:34, 35.

## **Thus Far and More**

Let us summarize to this point. We have learned that Christ

will return; He has been raised; all others shall be raised; and this will occur at the end of all things. It is then that the kingdom, the church, will be delivered to the Father. Death will be destroyed by the resurrection, and the last enemy overcome.

John 5:28,29 teaches that all the dead, good and evil, shall be raised and raised the same hour. When will be the great day of the resurrection? Martha gives us this answer when she was discussing the resurrection with Jesus in John 11:24. *"I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."* The last day obviously marks the end of this world as well as the time of these other events already noted, including the resurrection.

### **Judgment**

John 12:48 tells us that all shall be judged by the Word of Jesus Christ, and that also will occur the *"last day."* Mathew 25 presents to us a part of the judgment scene that will occur when the Lord returns (Matthew 25:31). Second Thessalonians 1:7-10 reveals the judgment to occur when the Lord is revealed from heaven.

### **Prepare**

We return to our original text in Second Peter three. Verses 11, 12 and 14 urge us to respect the need of preparation for that day. Inasmuch as all of these things are coming to pass, seeing that all shall be dissolved, the heaven shall be on fire and the elements shall melt, the dead to be raised and the judgment to follow, it ought to be evident what kind of persons we should be. We should be holy, godly, without spot, blameless and found in peace with the Lord, which is possible only by faithfulness in Christ.

Consider the word *"hasting."* It is not to be confused with something hasty, but means earnestly desiring. Since the Christian earnestly desires the eternal reward in heaven, and awaits the return of his Savior, expecting and desiring that eventual event to be in his future, he knows the necessity to prepare for that return.

Second Peter 3:13 speaks of a new heaven and new earth. This present heaven and earth is our present place of habitation. But when the Lord returns it shall be no more. The place of habitation for the redeemed will be that new place called heaven where God lives. When the Lord comes again will be the day of

entrance into the eternal glories of this new habitation, this new heaven and earth, with Deity.

Peter knew there were skeptics and speculators. He exposed the fallacies of those who denied His return and those who thought they could predict when His return would be. He knew such people might arouse great emotions with sensational and fanciful speculations and imaginative theories of various kinds. He revealed adequate information from heaven to refute both classes of false people. He knew that teaching regarding the Lord's return would be twisted and wrested by the unlearned and unstable, as were certain writings of Paul so wrested. But these things we can know, understand and believe. We take hope in these truths and accept them as an essential part of the saving doctrine of Jesus Christ.

### **Ten Points**

In summary, what have we learned? (1) The Lord will return. (2) His delay does not nullify His promise to come. (3) His delay extends man's opportunity and probation. (4) He will come unexpectedly without signs to announce it. (5) It will mark the end of the world. (6) It will mark the end of His reign and the to be saved. (7) It will mark the end of His reign and the deliverance of the kingdom to the Father. (8) It will be the day of the resurrection of all. (9) It will be the day of judgment. (10) It will be the day of entrance into the heavenly reward for those who have made proper preparation through Christ.

† † † † †

## ***Money Matters***

Why should we study about money and giving? Why is it so important? The answer is because it is a Bible subject. There is more on the subject of money, the right attitude toward it and the proper use of it than there is on the Lord's Supper, baptism, marriage and many other subjects we all consider important. This is reason enough for our study. First Corinthians 9:11-13, *"If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of*

*this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ. Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar?"* Philippians 4:16, *"For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity."* Romans 10:15, *"And how shall they preach, except they be sent..."* All of these passages tell us why this study is important. Money is a means of getting the gospel to the world by supporting those who preach it.

Ephesians 4:28, *"Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth."* The needs of others that they cannot provide for themselves is why we need to study money matters. First Timothy 5:16, *"If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed."* There are those for whom the church has responsibility and we need to learn to give in order to provide for them as Scripture directs.

Proverbs 3:9, *"Honor the Lord with thy substance; and with the firstfruits of all thine increase."* Giving is a way of worshipping God. Philippians 4:17, *"Not because I desire a gift, but I desire fruit that may abound to your account."* Paul urged them to supply his need, not just for himself, but for their development. Acts 20:35, *"It is more blessed to give than receive."*

## **Proof of Love**

We are to give as a way of proving our love. Second Corinthians 8:8, *"I speak not by commandment but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love."* These are a few of the Bible reasons for knowing what God teaches regarding money, its acquisition, attitude toward it and disposition of it.

Who does God expect to give the financial support needed for the conduct of the work of the church? The answer is simple. God looks to Christians. Who else cares? Acts 2:42 speaks of brethren having fellowship, joint participation, sharing their goods in carrying the burdens. First Corinthians 16:2, Paul addressed the brethren and told them to *"lay every one of you by him in store."* The "you" referred to Christians. Everyone

must be involved. It is not a task for those of greater abundance only. The financial integrity of the Lord's church depends upon each member learning and doing as God says in this matter.

Since we are the children of God, and seeing how God has given to us, it is only reasonable and right that we also give to God. Our very lives have been given to us by God (Acts 17:5). God gave His Son (John 3:16). Ephesians 5:2, 25; First Timothy 2:6 both show that Christ gave Himself as a ransom for us. He offers to give us rest (Matthew 11:28). When God gives He gives liberally (James 1:5) and He is the giver of every good gift (James 1:17). First Corinthians 15:57, *"But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."* Deity has given so much. Is it strange that Deity expects humanity to give?

### **Stewards**

We can give acceptably only when we understand our relationship with the material things around us and under our control. First Chronicles 29:10, 11, 14, *"Wherefore David blessed the Lord before all the congregation and David said, Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel, our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness and the power, and the glory and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all... But who am I and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee."* This David said following a great contribution by Israel unto God. He said they only gave God what was His already.

Matthew twenty-five and the parable of the talents shows that we are but stewards of that which belongs to God. We are not owners, but only have certain portions entrusted to our care for a while for which we shall give an account to Him to Whom it belongs.

First Corinthians 4:2, *"Moreover it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful."* God warned Israel that in their prosperity they would forget the very source of their wealth. Deuteronomy 8:17,18, *"And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God; for he it is that giveth*



*thee power to get wealth, that he may establish this covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day.” The rich fool of Luke twelve made the mistake of thinking his wealth was his Job 1:21, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb and naked shall I return thither: The gave and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord.”*

### **It Is His**

People make such a foolish mistake to talk about “my money” and “God’s money.” There is no such distinction in reality. When money is in my pocket, it belongs to God. When I put it into the collection basket, it still belongs to God. Ownership does not change. Stewardship changes. When it is in my pocket I am the steward of it. When I give it into the collection plate, the eldership assumes stewardship over it. But it always belongs to God.

When it is in my pocket I am to use it to fulfill my obligations. When in the plate the eldership has responsibility to use it according to that which is authorized in Scripture for the church. At times the duty I have may overlap the collective duty all the church has together. At such times that for which I can use my money is the same for which the church can use its money. But I have personal duties, responsibilities and privileges that do not belong to the church nor for which the church has authority to be involved. It is a false doctrine that teaches that because the money always belongs to God that whatever I as an individual can do with my money the church can do the same. This is false because responsibilities and authority differ. But we must understand that never is what we have our own. It is God’s. We are caretakers and we shall give an account.

### **How and How Much**

How are we to give? How much are we to give? These are not the same question. How involves the heart. How much involves the amount. Matthew 6:1-4 warns against giving to be seen of others. Matthew 10:8, “*Freely ye have received; freely give.*” Second Corinthians 9:6,7, “*But I say unto you, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver.*” We

are to give *“as God hath prospered you.”* (First Corinthians 16:2. Luke 12:48, *“For unto whom much is given, of him shall much be required.”* Second Corinthians 8:12, *“For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath and not according to that he hath not.”*

There were several tithes that were applicable to the Jews. But there is no specified percentage or amount revealed in the new covenant. Some may hide behind this to justify doing less than the Jews. But we never read in any age or dispensation of people giving less than a tenth. We are to give liberally, cheerfully, bountifully, as we have prospered, with intent, planning and thought, as well as sacrificially. The widow gave of all her living (Luke 21:2). The Macedonians gave in their poverty (Second Corinthians 8:2). Some early Christians even sold their possessions in order to give (Acts 4:37).

The early church gave upon the first day of the week (First Corinthians 16:2). Strange how some realize this means every first day of every week in the matter of money, but somehow ignore this when it comes to observing the Lord's Supper, doing so only once a month, or quarterly, or whensoever the mood suits. But the language of First Corinthians 16 is the same as Acts 20:7. We can also give at other times as opportunity affords and need demands (Galatians 6:10). Some have been known to borrow money to live. Some have even been known to borrow money to give to the Lord.

### **The “Secret”**

If there is a “secret” to successful giving it is found in Second Corinthians 8:5 where it is said those brethren of Macedonia *“first gave of themselves to the Lord.”* One who truly gives himself to God will work toward proper giving. He will strive to be sacrificial in his giving (Romans 12:1, 12). We are not our own nor does what we have belong to us (First Corinthians 6:19, 20). Here is the key to proper giving. Deny self and put God and His kingdom and righteousness first (Matthew 6:33).

God once rebuked Israel because some were robbing God (Malachi 3:8). The way they were doing that was by refusing to give as they ought. People have, can and probably still do rob God when they fail to give as taught in Scripture. Money matters are important matters because money matters.

† † † † †



## ***Studying Leadership***

There has always been some attention paid to study of leadership in the church. Maybe much of the effort along this line has escaped my personal attention. But I am encouraged to see what appears to me to be a stronger emphasis of late on this theme. Lectureships, special meetings, class studies are being devoted to it. Brethren have written some excellent books on leadership generally and on the elders, deacons, preachers and others leadership roles.



**JAMES W. BOYD**

Leaders should be sobered, alerted and better equipped by the stern warnings and condemnations against leaders that do not assume and discharge their duties properly. Everyone needs to be informed of the duty of leaders to the congregation and the duties of the congregation to their leaders. Recognizing how prevention is far better than even a cure, more study and application of the qualifications for leadership is in order. While there may be some exceptions, generally speaking as goes the leadership will go the church.

We would commend to brethren everywhere a renewed emphasis on the work, authority, attitude, opportunity and rewards of leadership.

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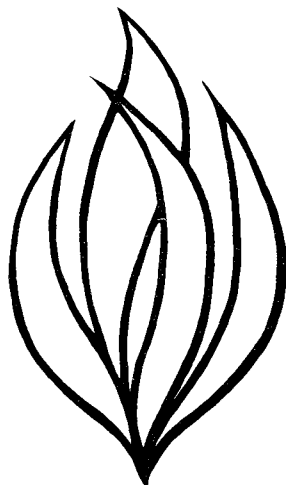
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# A Burning Fire



*"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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# **True Wisdom**

The definition of wisdom is the quality of being wise, having the ability to judge and deal with keen perception various facts as they pertain to life and conduct. When one is wise he is able to distinguish between that which is bad from that which is good. But he is able to do even better than that. He can distinguish between things, both of which are good, but one is better than another. He knows the difference between the superior and the inferior.

In First Corinthians chapter one Paul writes of the wisdom of this world in contrast to the wisdom of God. Worldly wisdom, wisdom belonging to men as pertains to this world, is inferior to the wisdom of Almighty God. In fact, worldly wisdom is characterized as foolishness when compared to the wisdom of God (First Corinthians 1:18-31).

James 3:13, *"Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom."* Here is the way to tell whether one is truly wise or not. Let his manner of life be such that the graciousness of godliness will be evident. This will be the evidence of his wisdom. He can prove himself wise when there is enthroned in his heart gentleness and meekness.

James 3:14-16, *"But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work."*

## **Two Kinds of Wisdom**

We can understand the contrast between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom that is from above. Both kinds of wisdom will manifest itself in the attitude of heart and manner of life.

In verse seventeen, James writes to contrast evil wisdom with the wisdom that is from above, which is wisdom indeed. *"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."* Jewish sages agreed that true wisdom came from above. It was not the attainment by the genius of man, as was worldly wisdom. True wisdom is a gift

from God that can belong to man when man does as God directs. True wisdom is, as one describes, "the breath of power of God and a pure influence from the glory of the Almighty."

James uses eight words to describe this wisdom from above. Let us give a brief consideration to each of them.

### **Pure**

In verse seventeen there is the word "*pure*" from the Greek word "hagnos." The root meaning of this word is to be pure enough to approach gods, pure enough to go before that which is higher than self. To the Greeks this word had a ceremonial meaning. One was considered pure when he had undergone a proper ritual of cleansing and was therefore allowed into the presence of the one that was worshipped. It was altogether a ritual purity, not a moral or inward purity.

In Christian usage, the word includes not only the outward and ritualistic purity but also the purity of mind or heart as well. Therefore, true wisdom is wisdom cleansed of an evil heart and ulterior motive. One who is truly wise places emphasis on both outward purity of life but also on purity of mind and thoughts.

### **Peaceable**

A second word is translated "*peaceable*" from the word "eirenikos." It has a very special meaning which infers the right relationship between man and man, but also between man and God. We are all aware of this two-fold relationship that we have in life. True wisdom will provide the right relationship in both instances.

There is a kind of wisdom that is clever, arrogant and separates one person from another as one looks with contempt on his fellowman. There is a kind of wisdom that is cruel and takes delight in hurting others with clever and cutting words. We might call such a person with this kind of wisdom a "smart-aleck."

There is another kind of worldly wisdom that we could define as pseudo-intellectualism which is a wisdom of men designed to seduce people away from loyalty to God and His will. We see evidence of this so-called wisdom among so many who like to profess themselves to be scholars.

But true wisdom tends to bring men closer to each other and



closer to God. That which divides what ought to be united is not wisdom as much as it is foolishness.

### **Gentle**

A third word is translated considerate or gentle (epieikes). We are told this word is difficult to translate with equality. It implies doing more than just what is demanded in the written law. True wisdom enables one to know how to apply law and not wrongfully use law, forcing applications that are destructive rather than beneficial. There is always the possibility that man would be stricter than God in some instances. It is possible to read a law with such precision that one would actually violate God's intent for the law. For example, when Paul wrote regarding the eating of meat, while the eating was lawful, there also had to be consideration of others. Even though one had his "rights," he would be wise to be cautious in using his "rights" lest he do harm to others. Such wisdom knows how to properly mix justice and mercy, law and gentleness. Matthew Arnold said of true wisdom that it was "sweet reasonableness."

### **Easily Entreated**

A fourth word, translated "*easy to be entreated*," sometimes meaning to be open to reason, is the word "eupeithes." A wise one is not stubborn but can be persuaded. He is in possession of conviction, but at the same time is open to being taught and convinced. This does not imply weakness of conviction but a willingness to hear another appeal. True wisdom is not so rigid, austere, stern and harsh as to shut out additional information should such be relevant and applicable. A wise man will listen to others with an open mind, being skilled in knowledge to discern what he hears. When evidence demands, he will yield to persuasion. He knows when to change and when to resist. It is not always weakness nor a disgrace to change one's mind. The old adage, "Wise men change their minds; fools never do," is sometimes befitting. We are truly wise to always be ready to conform to the will of God whatever that conformity may require of us.

### **Mercy and Fruits**

We shall consider the next two descriptions together. They are

*“full of mercy and good fruits.”* The world mercy, like the one translated pure, includes more in Christian thought than it did among the Greeks and in their religions. Mercy reflects pity for the person who is suffering, especially unjustly, in the mind of Greeks. But to the Christian it reflects pity for those in trouble even when the trouble has been self-imposed. This is like God whose pity went out to man even when man was lost because of man’s own transgressions. This kind of mercy is sympathetic, not deliberately vindictive. Mercy is withholding punishment even when punishment is deserved. It is closely related to grace which is granting favor when favor is not merited.

Sometimes we may be apt to comment that a person brought his problems on himself and summarily dismiss any concern for him because he did it to himself and deserves what he gets. It may be true that he or she is at fault, but this does not mean we are unconcerned nor shall we “wash our hands” of him or her.

True wisdom includes even more than pity for the man who has inflicted himself. True wisdom produces good fruits in the form of practical assistance. Christian mercy is not just an emotion, but includes action. The mercy that God extended was not simply an emotion. God did something for mankind. Can we claim we possess true wisdom and true mercy when we do not allow our pity to lead us to helpfulness?

### **Impartial**

The next description of true wisdom is *“without partiality,”* which conveys the thought also of being without uncertainty, without variance. A wise man knows his own mind, is not wavering, not divided within himself. He is not one thing today and something different tomorrow. He is stable and dependable. He chooses his course and is steadfast in it as long as that course shows itself to be right before God.

It seems that some must think it clever to never make up their minds on certain matters. They are always “studying the issue.” They are never able to weigh the evidence and come to a conclusion. While we ought not be too hasty in jumping to conclusions, we are expected to *“prove all things and hold fast to that which is good.”* (First Thessalonians 5:21). Some seem to prefer the uncertain sound, remaining unclear, ambiguous, indefinite, beating around the bush and never decisive.

They may even boast how open minded they are and reserved in judgment. But it is altogether possible that they are

like the words of an old song that said, "When I'm not near the one I love, I love the one I'm near." They are fickle and seek to please whomsoever may be in their company at the time. We have seen some who profess to be gospel preachers with this characteristic. We do not want to confuse fear, hesitancy, flightiness and uncertainty with true wisdom. Some seem to be *"ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."* (Second Timothy 3:7). But true wisdom will lead one to learn it, know it, and hold to it.

### **Without Hypocrisy**

Finally, true wisdom is without hypocrisy. It does not display a mere pose, pretense, just acting a part. The wise man does not deal with deception and disguises, concealing his real aims and motives. It is not wisdom to keep others guessing and wondering. Such breeds doubt, invites suspicion, and destroys confidence. True wisdom causes a person to be honest and above board rather than pretending. The hypocrite is a foolish person. Few things have been as severely condemned by our Lord as hypocrisy (Matthew 23).

James 3:18 concludes, *"And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace."* The seeds that produce a rich and righteous harvest cannot flourish in an atmosphere where proper relationships are not obtained and maintained. Nothing can grow when people are bitter toward each other and standing at variance.

In churches where these evil traits are evident the affairs are corrupted with strife and tension. The ground becomes barren and sterile rather than productive for the Lord. In such conditions all the striving for true wisdom is rendered ineffective and is without reward.

With these Biblical descriptions of true wisdom before us, wisdom which is from above, may we turn our attentions more and more to the acquisition of it through study and prayer (James 1:5). I will bring us blessings and will magnify and glorify the name of God.

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# ***A New Testament Beatitude***

The Bible is a book containing many beatitudes. A beatitude speaks of blessedness that characterizes certain traits of mind and action that makes one happy before God. Christ cited eight beatitudes in the introduction of the sermon He preached on some mount, recorded in Matthew 5, 6, 7. Psalms opens with a beatitude. There are over one hundred beatitudes in the Bible. The word "blessed" or "blessings" occurs over six hundred times. So it is proper that the Bible be considered as a book of blessing, or beatitudes.

One of these is found in Acts 20:35, *"I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

These words of Jesus are not found in the first four books of the New Testament. It is one of those morsels of the bread of life that fell from His lips that is not recorded elsewhere. John wrote that the world would not contain the books that could be written of all that Jesus did. But we have all that is necessary and what is all-sufficient (Second Timothy 3:16,17).

Unfortunately, many do not agree with Jesus in this statement. His thinking clashes with that of so many of us. Mankind, in his greed, covetousness, selfishness, has a different philosophy about giving and getting than what the Lord taught.

Giving is looked upon by many as necessary nuisance, and this includes giving to the work of the church as well as giving generally. Getting is the goal. Giving is one of those matters in life from which many wish to escape, not realizing what harm they are doing to themselves if they were never offered the opportunity to give.

## **A Sensitive Nerve**

Unquestionably, the "nerve" that runs from the heart to the pocketbook is a very sensitive one. It is so sensitive that it has caused many preachers to shy away from discussing it. When he does, there are always those who impugn his motives and accuse him of seeking more for himself. As one man once said, "All I hear is give, give, give." That, my reading friend, is not a bad commentary on the religion of Christ. God gave. Christ

gave. Christians give. There is far more on giving in the Scriptures than there is on the plan of salvation.

The real reason that "nerve" is so sensitive is because it is inflamed with the poison of sin. Preachers do their hearers a real service to probe into the subject and teach people to give as they ought. Let us consider the Lord's truth on this theme and learn why it is more blessed to give than to receive. Then we can "*honor God with our substance*," (Proverbs 3:9), and obey apostolic instructions regarding giving (First Corinthians 16:1,2; Second Corinthians 8:9).

Basically and essentially, giving is like God. God is concerned about blessing our universe. It was the joy of giving that moved God to create man and give man life. The same motive prompted Him to offer redemption to man (John 3:16). He is the giver of every good and perfect gift (James 1:17). Salvation itself is a gift (Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8,9).

It is more blessed to give than to receive because it is in the true imitation of the Son of God. The Lord lived among men to give enlightenment, comfort, guidance, hope and deliverance from sin. He came to offer mercy and salvation. His life was not one of being ministered unto, but one of ministering to others (Matthew 20:28). Precious little of this world's belongings did He ever have. "*The foxes have holes and the birds of the heaven have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.*" (Matthew 8:20).

## **Biography**

Our text, Acts 20:35, is almost a one line biography of Christ on earth. It is the story of His life. His very mission embodied giving up and giving for others. He gave up equality with the Father in heaven to take on the form of man (Philippians 2:5-8). He gave Himself for our sin (Galatians 1:4). He gave Himself to redeem us (Titus 2:14). One of the clear distinctions between "givers" and "getters" is found in the lives of Mary of Bethany in contrast with Judas Iscariot. Both were present at a supper prepared for Jesus (John 17). Mary took very costly ointment and anointed the feet of Jesus to honor Him. Judas complained that such use of the ointment was wasteful and ought to have been put into the treasury that he kept. But the Bible reveals that Judas was a thief and stole from the bag. Malachi 3:8 raises the question, "*Will a man rob God?*" Judas gives the answer. The actions and failures to give as we ought is also evidence that the

answer is in the affirmative. We can rob God as much by failing to “put in” as by deliberately “taking out.”

The human family divides itself into the Marys and Judases. Some seem to think the world owes them a living and they only live to get. Others recognize their debt to the world and to God and live to give. Some serve God for what they think they might get out of it materially. There are even preachers who appeal to people on the basis that serving God will get you a better car, better house, better job, more clothes, etc. But there are others who serve the Lord and their fellowman because their love is so great that they want to do something good for others and they want to honor God with what they have in their stewardship.

Giving is the unselfish, sacrificial, blessed example of our Lord. He has set the example for us to follow.

### **For Our Benefit**

But again, it is more blessed to give than to receive because giving enlarges a person's life. We all believe Paul when he taught that we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7,8). The Lord said, Luke 6:38, *“Give and it shall be given unto you.”* There is the story about the preacher who preached in a small rural church and whatever financial support he received was the amount that was placed in a little box just inside the doorway. People passed the box as they entered. One Sunday he took his small son with him to this small church and he put in his contribution as he entered. He conducted the services, did his preaching, almost everything was left for him to do. After it was over he went by the box to get what was given. All that was there was what he himself had given. He was rather disgruntled about it. His son noticed his displeasure and said, “Dad, if you had put more in you would have got more out.” Truer words can not be spoken when it comes to rendering service unto God. The reason some do not get much from their religion is because they invest so little in it as to time, energy, prayer, thought, work and money.

Another story is about a man who went to heaven and began looking for his mansion. Angels led him down one street, then another, and the mansions on each street kept getting less and less fine. Finally they came to the doorsteps of a rather modest place and the man expressed great disappointment. But the angel explained, “We did the best we could with what you sent ahead to us.” The story carries the point we want to make.

We are not to give just so we can get. We may not get very much in this life at all, except hardship, persecution and even death. To give for the purpose of getting is to destroy the purity of motive in giving. But being blessed is a promised return to those who give as they ought. In fact, we get far more than we ever give. We have often suggested that God makes it hard to sacrifice. Yes, He teaches us to sacrifice, but He blesses us so abundantly with things that matter that we do not feel we have sacrificed at all.

### **Treasures in Heaven**

Giving is an investment, not an expense. It is laying aside eternal securities (Matthew 6:19,20). That which a man treasures most is that which is dearest to his heart. It is folly to let our treasures be of the earthly sort because they shall corrode, rust, be consumed and cannot last. They are temporal at best, and even then, we cannot take any of it with us (First Timothy 6:7). They shall all perish with the using. Jesus taught that such treasures are deceitful because they seem to be what they are not. They cannot give security for the soul. They are not even the means to happiness in life. How many wealthy people are living in an earthly torment because they have trusted in riches and have leaned on that which cannot sustain them? Read about the rich man in Luke twelve and see how deceived he was when he had relied on his wealth for his soul's security !

We injure the soul, endanger our hope of heaven, and are very subject to missing what really counts in life when we concentrate on earthly wealth to the neglect of the spirit. Only that which is invested in spiritual things shall remain beyond the river of physical death. We lay up treasures in heaven by giving.

One man was quite successful financially and decided to give fifty thousand dollars to the church. But later he suffered business reverses and lost his fortune and had to start again. Someone asked him if he did not wish he had that fifty thousand back again. His answer was, "No sir, that is the only amount of my fortune that I really saved." We can fare sumptuously every day and die and be in torment if we fail to put material things in their proper place and use what we have to the glory of God.

We cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24). This is a common error that many are making today by trying to be Christians but still having such a love and desire for money and the things that money buys. We can use mammon for service,

but if we are not careful we shall become the servant of it. Many have done that and we are subject to that also. Only when we are honest in its acquisition, possess the right attitude toward it, and faithful to God in its disposition as good stewards can we receive personal and eternal blessings from the material things of this world. By giving as we should, we can be counted a worthy steward of that which is entrusted to us. After all, temporary steward is what we are. We are stewards of that which belongs to God, which he has loaned us for a while, and we shall turn it all over to somebody else sooner or later.

### **As Ye Receive**

When Christ sent out His apostles He gave them great powers, such as power to heal the sick, cast out demons, etc. Then He taught them a great principle that we need to learn. *"Freely ye have received; freely give."* (Matthew 10:8). Again He taught, *"For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required."* (Luke 12:48). It is that way with me and you and with what we have.

On the basis of these thoughts, let me urge you that you take another consideration of your contributions. I do not appeal to you just on the basis of the need that the church constantly has for more funds. That will always be with us. It should be that way. I appeal to your faith in Christ and your confidence in what He said when He said, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."*

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### **Attend Gospel Meetings**

People talk a great deal about wanting to help spread the cause of Christ and encourage others to be saved. Well, one way that is readily available and open to nearly all of us is to support efforts to preach the gospel such as is done in gospel meetings. Some seldom attend them, even at their home congregation. But each one can be a significant help in this if we just would. Will you become one who is known to hold up the hands of others and attend?



# ***The Nature of Christ and the Significance to Us***

Who is Christ? What is Christ? Regardless of how you ask it, it is of paramount importance to our civilization, our age, our children and ourselves. It is important whether we realize the extent of that importance or not. As the conflict against Christianity expands in the world, this question is asked more and more by the young, friends, enemies, everyone. Some say one thing and others something else. We need the truth set before us concerning Christ more than ever.

Most all agree that Jesus of Nazereth lived on the earth, although there be some who would even deny that. Some of the bitterest enemies of the Lord contend He is but a fable and myth character, created out of Jewish folklore and imagination, with stories invented about Him by His friends and expanded as time progressed. But most are not so blind to the evidence of His life and existence on earth. They agree He was a real person, having human faculties and walked among His fellowmen.

But there is strong disagreement as to who Jesus is or was. This question deals with His Deity, not simply His humanity. Was He merely another man, even though exceptional, but nothing more? Did He exist as a conscious being before His birth by Mary? Does He live now? If He is more than merely another human being, of what rank is He? What kind of being was He on earth? Was He truly God in the flesh, endowed with all the distinctive attributes of Deity, yet His own separate and distinct personality?

Such matters may well extend beyond the grasp of human reasoning and comprehension. We are compelled to rely upon testimony and witnesses who saw Him, heard Him, and wrote concerning this matter. It is the Bible to which we must turn for there, and only there, can we find reliable testimony concerning the nature of Christ and the significance to us.

## **Deity and Humanity**

The Scriptures teach that He was God as well as man. In some respects, even while on earth, He was one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. In other respects, He was distinct and

particularly so while in human form. Let us consider the Biblical evidence that He was God as well as man.

### **Names**

His names were names given to Deity. Isaiah 9:6, *"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son if given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."* In this prophecy concerning Christ there is no question that the prophet gave Him identifications denoting Deity.

John 1:1, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* Verse fourteen identifies the Word as the One that was made flesh and dwelt among us. Deity is assigned Him here.

*"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 1:8). Here the Son is called, explicitly, by the term "God."

The name, Jehovah, is considered to be the most sacred of all the names given to Deity. Jesus is included in that name. Psalm 83:17,18, *"Let them be confounded and troubled forever, yea, let them be put to shame, and perish, that men may know that thou, whose name alone is Jehovah, art the most high over all the earth."* The same point is made in Isaiah 42:8, Psalm 97:7, regarding Jehovah. *"Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship him, all ye gods."* In Hebrews 1:6 the inspired writer refers to this passage and applies it to the Son of God. There is no question but Deity is asserted concerning Him.

Isaiah 40:3, *"The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."* This is an obvious reference in prophecy to the work of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ (Matthew 3:1-3). Isaiah called the One before whom John would go as God or Jehovah. All these names attribute to Jesus the names of Deity.

### **Exclusive to Deity**

The Scriptures ascribe to Jesus the power, honors and rights that belong only to Deity. Jesus has the power of creation.

Genesis 1:1 tells us God created. John 1:1-3 tells us *"all things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made,"* referring to the Word that became flesh. If Jesus Christ Paul wrote, *"...who created all things by Jesus Christ."* (Ephesians 3:8,9). *"For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in the earth, visible and invisible..."* (Colossians 1:16,17), with reference to the Son of God. Likewise Hebrews 1:10 asserts His creative power.

Only Deity is the proper object of worship. *"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God and him only shalt thou serve."* (Matthew 4:10). Yet, this honor is given to the Son of God (John 5:22,23). *"Let all the angels of God worship him."* (Hebrews 1:6). *"Wherefore God hath highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* (Philippians 2:9-11). Surely, no additional evidence is needed to show that Jesus Christ is a proper object of worship. Such was to be given Him as recorded in Revelation 19:10; 22:9).

Deity also has exclusive rights and prerogatives which no other has. Yet, Christ has these things. The general tone and scope of the Bible is that God has the right to forgive sins. Is it not evident that Jesus both claimed that right and exercised it while on earth (Luke 5:20-25)?

## **The Godhead**

In addition to the names, power, honors, and rights of Deity, the Scriptures frequently represent the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as coordinate agents in such works as the creation, providence and the redemption of man. These three make up the Godhead, the Godhood, and are in oneness. As for Jesus, *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."* (Colossians 1:9). The term "Elohim" of Genesis 1:1 in the Hebrew, translated "God," is a plural word. All three persons of the Godhead are included. Genesis 1:26, *"Let us make man in our image..."* expressed the plurality of the Godhead. The Father was involved (Psalm 102:25). The Holy Spirit was involved (Genesis 1:2; Job 26:13). The Son was involved (John 1:1-3). So all three are included in the plural term "God."

This same relationship is expressed in the authority for baptism (Matthew 28:19,20), and again all three are included in

Second Corinthians 13:14.

The Scriptures further ascribe to Jesus Christ as on an equality with the Father and one with Him. *"My Father worketh hitherto and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the Sabbath, but said that God was his Father, making himself equal with God."* (John 5:17,18). *"I and my Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy, and because that thou, being man, makest thyself God."* (John 10:30-33). *"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?"* (John 14:8,9). Other passages that teach Jesus and the Father as one can be found in Philippians 2:5-8 and John 17:20,21. Nothing could be stated with greater plainness and clarity than these words.

### **Is Christ Inferior?**

But do not the Scriptures speak of Christ as being inferior to the Father? For instance, *"For 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."* (Hebrews 2:9). Again, *"I can of mine own self do nothing, as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me."* (John 5:30). John 14:28, *"Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father, for my Father is greater than I."* All these passages indicate an inferiority of Christ relative to the Father, at least in some sense.

As we seek understanding we must first realize that God's Word does not contradict itself. So there is a sense in which the Son was inferior to the Father. This had reference to His humanity, not His Deity. The very relationship of Father and Son implies a greater and lesser in some sense. But there is no doubt that He who became flesh and dwelt among us was Deity. His inferiority in the flesh was for a specific purpose of dying on behalf of mankind, and it only underscores the teaching that Jesus was Emmanuel, God in the flesh, God with us.

Other Biblical evidences of the Deity of this Person should be studied, such as His birth by the virgin Mary, the manner of His works, His Words, miracles, and the way He fulfilled prophecies. Of course, there is the resurrection by which He was declared to be the Son of God (Romans 1:4). But all these are deserving of special study in themselves. We have in this lesson noticed some of the candid and explicit declarations of Scripture that proclaim the nature of Jesus Christ as simultaneously while on earth being of dual nature, humanity and Deity.

### **So What?**

What is this to us? It means that what He said is true. It means that His commands must be obeyed. He has authority and we are accountable and subject unto Him. We shall give an account of our lives before Him. We are answerable to Him for what we say, do and think. Our salvation depends on our disposition toward Him in our individual lives. That is the significance to us of the nature of Jesus Christ. If He had never lived, or was nothing more than just another splendid human being, the whole matter would be drastically changed. But inasmuch as Jesus of Nazareth was God's Son on this earth, and now reigns in heaven, our responsibilities regarding Him are awesome.

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## ***The Church Age***

There exists a widely held theory regarding the church and the kingdom connected with the events surrounding the return of Jesus Christ that asserts a literal one thousand years reign of Christ on the earth which is to begin upon His return. It is called the millennial theory or future kingdom theory. It contends that the kingdom of God has not yet come into existence but it yet in the future.

The advocates of this theory agree that Christ came to establish His kingdom but because He was rejected by the Jews He postponed that kingdom, returned to heaven, provided a temporary and substitute measure called the church, and He will

succeed in establishing His kingdom the next time He comes even though He failed to do so the first time in spite of the many predictions and promises of God that He would.

Jesus at the time of His return, according to the theory, has the right to be a king now, but has not yet taken His place on the throne. The conditions of prophecy that call for the existence of the Roman empire will be renewed, the Jewish temple restored in Jerusalem, and those saints who are living at the Lord's return will be taken into a seven year rapture, the wicked shall suffer a period of tribulation, then Jesus will return yet again and then there shall be a literal actual and physical carnal warfare called Armageddon. After the Lord's victory in that battle He shall begin to reign on His throne in the city of Jerusalem which shall last a literal one thousand years.

As stated, this doctrine has many variations to it and is held by many denominationalists. It was once a prominent issue among brethren in the churches of Christ but was successfully routed. Unfortunately, with the growth of Biblical ignorance and the advance of digression we see evidences of compromise toward this vain theory among some today. Some count the doctrine nothing more than whether women should wear veils and define it as a "gray area" topic over which there ought be no division.

Obviously, the theory makes the kingdom and the church separate institutions. We are told that we are now living in the "church age" but not the kingdom age.

### **Proof of Falsity**

Surely, no honest person would deny that the theory would be proven false if it can be shown that the kingdom has been established already, and that the church and the kingdom are one and the same. If it can be shown that Christ is already reigning as King of kings, and the church is neither an afterthought nor a substitute and temporary measure the theory must be false. While the theory contends that the Jews will be miraculously transported back to Palestine and saved, if it can be shown that Jew and Gentile must be saved the same way, the theory must be false. If it can be shown that the establishment of the kingdom of Christ was not contingent upon the Jews accepting Him anyway, the theory must be false. If the Bible teaches nothing about the so-called "rapture" and "the tribulation" of the theory, the theory must be recognized as nothing more than a speculative, fanciful and anti-Biblical

imagination by misguided religionists.

In Second Peter three where Peter discusses the return of Jesus Christ the one thousand year reign doctrine is made an impossibility because when Christ returns the elements shall melt with a fervent heat and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up (not just laid bare as the perverted New International Version states in one of its many accommodations with false doctrines). Where is anybody going to set up anything on a non-existent earth?

Was Christ a false prophet? If so, can we trust Him? He declared that the kingdom would come in the lifetime of some of those to whom He then spoke (Mark 9:1). He and John the Baptist had said the kingdom was "*at hand*," which means nearby and soon to be (Mark 1:14,15). This was promised nearly two thousand years ago. If Christ missed it then, could we have confidence that He will keep His word next time?

New Testament Christians were taught they were already in the kingdom (Colossians 1:13). How could they have been in something that has not even yet come into existence? This idea that the kingdom was not established and the church is a substitute for a temporary period or age makes the Old Testament prophecies as well as New Testament revelation unreliable if not outright fraudulent.

While we do not have the space in this single lesson to destroy every facet of the theory and thereby show its fallacy, let us consider Daniel the second chapter. Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream and the meaning of the image the king saw. He saw an image with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, and legs of iron with feet of a mixture of iron and clay. Daniel said this represented four kingdoms, the first of which was Babylon. This image was ground to pieces by a stone not made with hands, of divine origin, one from God, and that stone grew into a kingdom that surpassed all previous ones. That stone would come in the days of the fourth of the four kingdoms (Daniel 2:44). Following Babylon came the Persian, then Grecian, then Roman empires. It was in the days of Rome that Jesus came and the church was established. It was then that the kingdom was established as Daniel had prophesied would come to pass.

Daniel 7:13,14 teaches that the Son of man, Jesus, would return to the Ancient of days, the Father, and be given a kingdom. Jesus did return to heaven after His resurrection and was given the kingdom as foretold when the events of Pentecost

and the establishment of the church transpired.

### **More Evidence**

Really nothing more needs to be said to remove the theory from the realm of truth. But consider the promise of Jesus to establish the kingdom with power in the lifetime of some of His hearers (Mark 9:1). That power was identified as the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). That power came (Acts 2) and the prophecies were fulfilled, the church established and the conditions for the establishment of the kingdom were met.

Isaiah 2:2,3 tells what was to happen in the last days (which Hebrews 1:1,2 defines as the time when God speaks through His Son). Joel also had foretold the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last days. Peter quoted Joel on Pentecost and said “*this is that*” which Joel prophesied. What was to happen? The mountain of the Lord’s house, which is the church (First Timothy 3:15), was to begin. Hebrews 12:22-28 refers to the mountain of the Lord’s house that was to begin at Zion, which verse twenty-eight identifies as the kingdom, and which verse twenty-three identifies as the church.

Luke 24:46-49 teaches that the message of remission of sins would begin from Jerusalem, and this was stated after His death burial and resurrection were already accomplished. The apostles stayed in Jerusalem as instructed and power came upon them as promised and all these things began then which was the time of the establishment of the Lord’s house or kingdom. The fact remains, if the kingdom did not come as had been foretold, God defaulted on His Word. Who can believe that?

### **Mystery Revealed**

Ephesians 3:8-11 teaches that Paul wrote to enable men to see that which had been a mystery for ages. But it is no longer a mystery. It was “*by the church*” that the wisdom of God was made manifest. The very existence of the church was and is a demonstration of the wisdom of God and His plan to save mankind. This was “*according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” This plan was no afterthought upon the failure of Christ to establish His kingdom. The existence of the church had always been in God’s plan and purpose. So the theory that degrades the church is necessarily a false one and one that denominationalists must give answer to



God for having propagated.

The church is called a **kingdom** to emphasize certain features of it just as it is called a **family** or **household** to stress the family relationship of those in the church. It is called a **temple** to emphasize the worship features pertaining to it. It is called the **body of Christ** to show the unity with Christ, the authority of Christ over it as its head, and the fellowship and relationship with Christ and among members of the body. It is called a **kingdom** to teach the governmental features of it.

### **More Evidence**

Futhermore, Christ, when He instituted the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:29,30) said He would not partake of it with them again until in the kingdom. Where? In the kingdom. Yet, First Corinthians 10:21 we find the Lord's Table in the church and First Corinthians eleven commands to partake of it. Therefore, the church and the kingdom are one and the same or you have the apostle Paul giving instructions that violated the teaching of Jesus. Who can believe that?

Passages before Acts two point to the coming of the kingdom and passages thereafter point back to Pentecost and the reality of the existence of the kingdom. Mark 1:14,15, the kingdom was at hand, soon to be, nearby. Matthew 6:9,10, Joseph of Arimathea took down the body of Christ from the cross and he *"waited for the kingdom of God."* Obviously, it had not come at that point in time. Is he still waiting?

Mark 9:1, it was to come during the lifetime of those to whom our Lord then spoke. Matthew 16:15-20, Peter was to receive the keys of the kingdom. Has he received them? Has he ever used them? How can he use them now since he has long since died? If the Lord could not establish the kingdom because the Jews rejected Him, who will have similar power to prevent Him establishing it next time? Their rejection did not change God's plan (Romans 3:3). And Jews and Gentiles shall be saved the same way (Romans 10:12; Acts 15:9-11). How many times must the theory be proven false before honest people reject the theory and adopt the truth?

Acts 28:3, Paul testified (bore witness) of the kingdom in Rome. Colossians 1:13,14, those in that church had been translated into the kingdom. Did it exist? If not, explain how they were in it? Hebrews 1:8 speaks of the kingdom in the present tense. Hebrews 12:28, brethren had already received

the kingdom. Revelation 1:9, John was in the kingdom as a brother to those in the churches that were addressed.

### **This is It**

We are living in the church age, no doubt about that. But it is also the kingdom age because the church is to the kingdom the same thing an automobile is to a car. They are the same. The doctrine that teaches otherwise is false and demeaning to Christ.

If the Jews are saved, they shall be saved the same way as Gentiles (Acts 15:9), not some miraculous transportation to Paletine and a miraculous conversion. Why men wish to pervert the Lord's Word and degrade the Lord's church is for them to explain. But thanks be to God that the kingdom promised is the church and is realized, and we can be members or citizens of it.

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## ***What The Young Deserve***

People talk a lot about underprivileged young people. Do such really exist? Our answer is, "Yes." But many are not underprivileged in the way many people think when they talk about the underprivileged. Usually people mean that some young people are lacking the material things of life. They grow up in poverty or inadequate educational opportunities. This is too often truth of both young and older people. Often the young are victims of circumstances over which they have no immediate control. With many who are older their difficult circumstances are sometimes self-imposed, but not always.

Materially underprivileged children are said to be the cause of juvenile delinquency. It is true that many poor children get into trouble. But it is not because they are poor. Many people who are poor never get into trouble because of stealing, fighting, etc. On the other hand, there are many who are reared in the lap of luxury who get into all kinds of trouble. So the factor causing juvenile delinquency must be something other than material wealth or the lack of it.

There are those things that young people deserve; things they ought to have; things that the older generation owes them. Too

often we hear people clamoring, "I want my rights. I want what is coming to me." This may sound fair, but if the truth were known, what they deserve is not always what they want.

We hear much about the "generation gap" and how the older generation has failed the oncoming one. In many instances this is true. It is not true with all and with most there is no generation gap. There are those who would like to destroy the work of parents and create and exploit their creation of a generation gap. Generations have always looked at things from different viewpoints, as would be expected. But generations have always learned to live happily together when both follow the Lord. Possibly this generation gap does exist with many because young people have not received what they deserve, or want what they do not deserve. Too many are overprivileged in matters that do not matter and are underprivileged in matters that really matter.

### **What is Undeserved**

Let us consider some things young people do not deserve and have no right to expect to be handed them. The world does not owe them a living. Work is a four-letter word that many young people think only applies to somebody else. Paul taught work. Jesus worked. The Father works. Work is not a curse nor a part of a curse. It is a cure to many ills and a blessing. No work; no eat is a Biblical principle that ought to be applied more than it is.

The world owes nobody pleasure, luxury, ease and freedom from problems and responsibilities. The world owes nobody success. Success depends on the person as much as any other factor. Ten per cent inspiration and ninety per cent perspiration usually is the stuff from which success is made.

The world owes nobody freedom and escape from the consequences of behavior. We reap as we sow. To the young Solomon wrote, "...but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment." (Ecclesiastes 11:9). We are accountable for our conduct. Today many are crying it is the fault of society for whatever happens to them, never the individual. That is foolishness gone to seed. Nobody makes you act like a devil. Nobody forces another to behave worse than animals. People are responsible and they have no right to be immune from the consequences of their behavior.

The world does not owe anybody happiness. That great blessing comes from within as one conforms to the will of God.

It is not created by the environment. Environment has a part in how we feel about things. But one can have that inward blessedness regardless of his environment.

No person can ever deserve heaven. We cannot earn it, merit it, deserve it, or erase one sin by ourselves. Sinners deserve condemnation.

## **Human Rights**

Please note that the Declaration of Independence declares the truth that there are certain inalienable rights a person has by virtue of the fact that he or she is a person, a human being. Of course, if evolution was true there would be no basis for human rights because we would all just be highly evolved animals. Evolution destroys human dignity and all reason to treat other humans with consideration befitting the human race. Young people have rights because they are human beings. This includes the unborn child in the mother's womb. This is ordained by the Lord because He created man in His spiritual image. When these inalienable rights are violated the abuser should be punished and restrained. Just what all these rights include are matters of great disagreement. But we do not have the right to deprive others of their rights in order to obtain ours. No man has a right to mistreat his neighbor.

Concerning young people, it must be realized that their rights must correspond to their responsibility and duty. Some want rights without assuming responsibility for properly using those rights. They want privileges without duties. Young people are deserving all the same rights as an adult when they can assume the same duty as adults that go along with those rights. This is one of the causes of the generation gap. Rights without responsibility is the watchword for too many youths.

## **What is Deserved**

What do young people deserve? They deserve proper instruction, training and discipline. God said to parents, *"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."* (Proverbs 22:6). *"Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."* (Ephesians 6:4). We pity that poor underprivileged child who has never had parents to show him the difference between right and wrong, or chastised him when

he violated the right, and rewarded and encouraged him when he did the right and avoided the wrong. How else can a young person know if he is not taught? There is nothing inherent or innate in him that tells him right from wrong. That is a matter of training and teaching. He deserves to receive this.

It is not love to indulge the child and deprive him of the knowledge of the will of God. *"My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother."* Proverbs 1:8). Similarly we read words of wisdom as *"Hear, ye children, the instruction of a father, and attend to know understanding."* (Proverbs 4:1). *"My son, keep thy father's commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother."* (Proverbs 6:20). *"He that spareth his rod, hateth his son, but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes."* (Proverbs 13:24). *"Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him."* (Proverbs 22:15). *"Withhold not correction from the child, for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell."* (Proverbs 23:13,14). *"Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old."* (Proverbs 23:22). *"The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame."* (Proverbs 29:15). Any child, allowed to reach physical maturity without instruction, training, disciple and example is undeprived.

Some have gone to the sinful extreme in correcting children and abused the child. This is neither taught, warranted nor sanctioned by the will of God. Discipline is not the same as child abuse. Older people must learn the distinction.

### **Blessings of Duty**

Young people deserve having duties to perform according to their ability. Youth is not a time for the fulfillment of all of the matters of life, but a time for preparation. A young person is not supposed to be an adult nor supposed to live all the phases of life in their youth as if they were small adults. Many parents have not yet learned this important point and treat their children as if the children were just smaller adults and must be involved in adult matters on a smaller scale. This is nonsense!

Children need chores and work to teach them to be responsible and to learn the job of doing tasks successfully. They cannot handle adult matters but there are things they can do. Yes, they often fuss about it, like adults do, but the adage is

still true, "An idle mind is the devil's workshop."

Life imposes responsibilities. The sooner one learns to deal with duty the sooner he will be equipped for the realities of life. Doing everything for them is not really helping them, but hindering their development.

### **Christ in the Home**

Young people deserve a home where Christ reigns supreme; where there is love, consideration, sympathy, kindness, a strong father and mother image, where successes are shared with enthusiasm and where failure are shared so they can be turned into advantages and learning experiences alongside encouragement to overcome obstacles and disappointments.

A home that provides security, comfort, where the rule is to love God's way is a home that is truly a blessing to the young. We may be able to teach our young how to make a living but fail to teach them how to live.

Young people deserve a home where each person is appreciated and loved. Some get sick of home and leave it as soon as they are able. Others, when they leave, get homesick, because they remember the love of the home. Home is where one is accepted and loved for what he or she is, but always being encouraged to be what you ought to be and are capable of being. Home may include criticism, but corrective and constructive criticism in kindness and helpfulness.

A good home is not determined by the address, household furnishings, the number of cars in the garage or driveway. The humblest of dwellings are often the best homes. A good home is determined by love, loyalty to Christ and one another, where all are taught to respect the respectable and have reverence for Deity. Parents have the duty to set the tone for the home in such things. Young people are underprivileged and deprived when such as this is lacking.

There is a moving story about a lady who once answered a knock at her door and a little boy asked, "Does Jesus live here?" This is a question everyone of us ought to ask regarding our homes and strive to make it a place where Jesus lives.

### **Right to Obey**

Young people have the right to obey God when they reach accountability. *"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy*

youth..." (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Young people deserve an example before them of obedience to the gospel. Parents cannot lead where they will not go. How will children ever be impressed with the need to obey the gospel when father or mother or both ignore the Lord and refuse to obey Him?

Young people deserve the opportunity to develop their talents. They deserve the opportunity to learn and study the Lord's Word. They deserve Christian association to aid them in their upbringing. The church seldom overcomes the influence of the home in matters of leading children to Christ. Young people have a right to a good church that is interested in their soul.

No person, young or older, has a right to live life any way he pleases, but as God pleases. God gave life. Life belongs to God. To deprive God of our life is to take from Him what belongs to Him.

We might suggest many other things young people deserve and we may be able to provide many things for them. But if we fail them in their training, instruction, discipline, work, example and service to God through Christ, we have sinned against the child and we have failed them in what matters most.

The young person deserves a place of refuge in his years of growth. Home should be his haven where he or she can take problems, frustrations, joys, and where self-esteem can be developed, respect for authority held aloft, and God is the ruler of home.

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## **Nine Volumes Completed**

When ever a big step is taken toward a cherished goal you enjoy a sense of success and accomplishment. This is true even in those projects that you undertake that may not seem to be so significant to some others but are very significant to you. I suppose this is somewhat the way I feel with this issue of this booklet I call **A Burning Fire**. It was several years ago that I decided to put the sermons I have preached through the years into print in some form. The booklet you have before you is the form chosen to accomplish this.



**JAMES W. BOYD**

This issue marks the completion of nine volumes with twelve issues each. It also is just a bit past the halfway point of publishing all of the sermons that I hope to publish in this fashion.

I have been more than rewarded for undertaking this project because many have commented to me of the spiritual benefit they have received from reading the material. That is precisely what I intend to accomplish. **A Burning Fire** is just one method I am using to spread the gospel of Christ. Besides the personal enjoyment of producing it, I do gain great satisfaction in knowing that people in many places are exposed to truth.

\* \* \* \* \*

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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