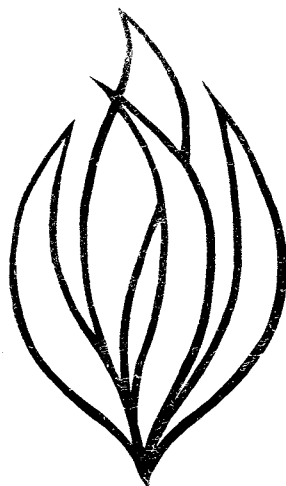


A Burning Fire



"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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Love

Number One

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 which are freely given us of God, which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth, comparing spiritual things with spiritual."*

This passage, alongside others, affirms the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures. The words chosen in Scripture were not coincidentally written. They are not words of man's choosing even though taken from man's vocabulary. They are words that Deity, the Holy Spirit, chose by which the will of God is revealed to man. God's will in God's chosen words is what we have in Scripture.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek, a language that has the unparalleled ability to express shades of meaning. Often an entire series of Greek words are used, each expressing a slightly different shade of meaning, but translated by just one English word. Our language, English, does not have this same shading ability as does the Greek. We can, however, learn the shades of meaning and know the will of God.

The English word "love" is used to translate four Greek words, actually more when you consider the various verb and noun forms. We do not have to be Greek scholars to understand this and understand the variance of meanings.

Greatest Virtue

Without question love is the greatest of all virtues. Matthew 22:36, *"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and greatest commandment."* Love is the prime characteristic of the Christian faith. It is the canopy or umbrella under which all other virtues find meaning and value. First Corinthians 13:13, *"Now abideth faith, hope, charity (love), these three, but the greatest of these is charity (love)."* Let us consider these four Greek words that are translated by the single term "love."

Eros

One Greek word translated “love” is the word **eros**. This word is used mainly to express love between the sexes. It is sometimes used as patriotism, love for country, and even the passion of ambition. But mostly it speaks of physical and sexual relationships. With usage the word has acquired a low, base and immoral meaning, like the English word “lover” is sometimes used to refer to a partner in illicit sexual intercourse. Such love is not compatible with the New Testament or Christianity and does not convey Christian love. Although the word **eros** is in the Greek language it is not found in the New Testament. Never does Scripture include as love something that is immoral and impure as is often spoken among people today.

Storge

Another word is **storge** which is a love of a different nature. This has to do with family affection, love between parent and child, sometimes love that people have for the ruler of the nation. A similar idea is expressed in Romans 12:10 where Paul wrote, *“Be kindly affectioned one to another.”* The emphasis is on the familyhood of God’s people. The church is not only an institution, the body of the saved, but a family in special relationship and fellowship with God and each other.

Philia

The word most commonly found in Greek generally that is translated “love” is the word **philia**. It is not, however, the word used most in the New Testament, but is used in the Greek language generally most often. It has a great warmth about it. It means to look upon another with high regard, respect and esteem. It includes friendship, even the respect that should and does exist between husband and wife. It includes physical expressions of love, but the emphasis is more on the closeness, warmth, respect and high regard for each other. Matthew 10:37 uses it. *“He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”* Again, John 11:3,36, concerning Jesus and Lazarus, *“Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick... Behold, how he loved him.”* The same idea is in the expression of the love Jesus had for John. John 20:2, *“...and to the other*

disciple, whom Jesus loved."

Agape

The word translated "love" found most frequently in the New Testament is the word **agape**. It is the word the Holy Spirit chose to express Christian love. In a few cases **philia** is used, but that is rare. **Agape**, and various forms of it, is found over two hundred fifty times; far more than any other. Singularly, the word is rarely used in other Greek writing, we are told. It seems to carry a special meaning that is more peculiar to Christianity. Therefore, to understand Christian love we must delve into the meaning of **agape**.

We are made to wonder why the other words were relatively abandoned in favor of a word seldom found except in the New Testament. **Eros** has a definite association with that which is vile, illicit and immoral. **Storge** is tied mainly to family affections and is not broad enough to include all that Christian love embraces. **Philia** is used regarding those near and dear to us, such as friends. **Agape** is a term that is even broader than love for friends, mate or members of the family. Christian love extends in ever-widening circles. **Agape** reveals how far reaching Christian love really is.

Areas of Love

Certainly love begins in the family (Ephesians 5:23,28,33). Love in the home is one of the very best showcases for displaying Christian love. But love for family is natural and expected. It requires little effort to love kith and kin. The adage, "Blood is thicker than water," recognizes the natural tie in families. When love is taught and exhibited in the family, however, love outside the family is easier to cultivate.

Christian love goes beyond the family to the brotherhood. First Peter 2:17, "*Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.*" John 13:35, "*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*" One of the cries of the heathen as they observed Christians was, "Behold, see how these Christians love one another." It is always a serious handicap to the Lord's church when there is bitter wrangling from within. The church is misrepresented. The church should stand in love and united in love; united on matters of faith where God has spoken, and charitable toward

each other in matters calling for human judgment. Woe be to that person or persons who perpetuate strife on matters of a personal and judgmental nature.

But Christian love extends beyond family and brotherhood to include neighbors. Romans 13:9, "*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*" Galatians 6:10, "*As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*" James 2:8, "*If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well.*" Christian love looks upon all people as creatures in the spiritual image of God. There is no unimportant person simply because they are persons.

Even to Enemies

But Christian love, uniquely, extends even to enemies, when such one may have. Matthew 5:43,44, "*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.*" No matter what one is, what one does, we are to love them. No matter how wronged we have been, or injured, insulted or slandered, the Christian love pities the evildoer. Christian love, like ripples made in a pool of still water when a stone is tossed into it, extends itself in ever-widening circles until it covers all.

Deliberate and Wilful

There is no particular virtue in simply loving our kin because this is natural. Loving those who love us is not difficult. Christian love is an emotion, but one that is deliberately called forth. It is a wilful achievement, even if it be against nature to love. Christian love has to do with the heart of man, his intellect, his mind and does not demand love in return in order to love. It is not a natural response, but a deliberate victory of the will that produces certain attitudes and actions toward all mankind regardless of who or what they are.

This is not to say that we love everyone just alike. We cannot do this and it is humanly, mentally and emotionally impossible. This is recognized by the various shades of meaning of love. There are priorities even in love. But it does require a certain special and basic quality and outlook toward others. What is that

special and basic outlook?

Real Love

Here we find the real meaning of **agape**, the word Deity has chosen most often to express Christian love. Matthew 5:43-48, *"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For it ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if you salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publican so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father which is in heaven is perfect."*

This expresses the extent of love, even to love enemies. God is the leader in love. Why are we to love even our enemies? It is in order to be like God. God sends His rain on the just and unjust alike; on the evil and good. That means, no matter what a person is, God seeks nothing but that person's highest good. This bears repeating! Love means seeking the other's highest good. This is the maturity and wholeness (perfection) that is characteristic of God. This is the very root of Christian love. All else springs from this concept and every other virtue finds its beginning and value in it. This is the canopy under which everything about the Christian faith operates. This is not to say, as some mistakenly contend, "Love is all." There is much more than love in Christianity. But it does show the underlying foundation of the faith. This is the meaning of **agape**, that special term that teaches Christian love which means seeking the other's highest good. Future lessons shall focus on this measure of love, what it implies, requires, allows and how it relates to all associations, even between God and man and man and his fellowman.

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Love

Number Two

When we speak of Christian love in the context of people loving people, we must realize that such love is the “*fruit of the Spirit*” (Galatians 5:22). Such love does not spring from within us because of our goodness, but the source is Deity. Man cannot and does not originate and develop such love without Deity. When the Holy Spirit takes possession of a person’s life, which is accomplished as the person follows the Word of God, this love fills his heart and he grows more and more like Christ in his attitudes toward others. It is impossible for one who is not a Christian to possess and exhibit Christian love. One may see the desirableness of such love and even recognize it as the solution to problems, even mentally accepting the truth that this love is what God expects. But one cannot live in Christian love until Christ lives in him.

Unworkable?

There are those who are skeptical and critical about Christian love. They misunderstand it. They contend that such love is unworkable and impractical in this imperfect and sinful world. Christian love is seeking the other’s highest good. But some think this means to allow everybody to do whatever they want. They say such love would permit the world to be dominated by the criminal element, the evildoer, those who possessed the greatest power. They think it would demand letting all people have their own way. Of course, if that were the case, life would be impossible and disorder would prevail. Christian love is not simply letting everybody have their own way. In fact, it is quite the contrary to that. If we seek the other’s highest good there are times when we may have to resist him, oppose him, even punish him. Christian love is not to be considered permissive and simply allowing people to “do their own thing” without regard to the consequences to themselves and others. Does not God love us? Does not God often oppose mankind in what man sets out to do? Love enforces rules. It does not dismiss rules and laws. It is not love to be permissive and without restrictions. That could be the worst thing for another and not their highest good.

Love is not vindictive nor does it seek revenge. But love will

demand that evildoers be checked for their own good and for others. So the criticism and misunderstanding about love only reflects how much more we need to learn concerning it. It is not the fault of God or the love He teaches that some of us misunderstand and misapply love.

Foundational

We learn that love is as the Bible defines and teaches is the basis of every perfect relationship in heaven and in earth. This is one reason that **eros** is not love. **Eros** involves immorality, impurity and sin. There are many passages that show love as the basis of perfect relationships and we shall confine ourselves to but a few.

Love is the basis for the relationship between the Father and Son. John 3:35, *"The Father loveth the Son..."* John 14:31, *"...that the world may know that I love the Father."* These were words of Jesus speaking of this relationship.

Love is the attitude that the Father and Son have toward humanity. John 3:16, *"For God so loved the world..."* Romans 5:8, *"But God commendeth his own love toward us..."*

To love God the Father and Christ the Son is the basis of man's duty to Deity. Luke 10:37, *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind..."* Christianity is not simply man submitting to the power of God or cowering under the threats and warnings that God has issued. It is in its best stage man surrendering to the love of God and returning that love to God. The very substance and body of the faith is our love for the Lord. We have not seen Him except by faith we have that is based in the evidence that God has provided. Yet, we believe in Him and love Him. First Peter 1:8, *"...whom not having seen, we love."*

We sing two songs that express the idea adequately. "O, how I love Jesus," and "I am so glad that Jesus loves me." Love is the basis of the relationship between Deity and humanity.

Likewise, love is the basis for the relationship between Christians. John 13:34,35, *"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."* John 15:12,13, *"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I*

command you.” First John 3:11,23, *“For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another... And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.”* Christians have been described as a people who love Christ and each other. So we see that every conceivable relationship in heaven and earth that is right, proper, perfect, pure and holy is based on love. Does not this emphasize the greatness of this virtue?

God Loves Man

We must consider God’s love for man because without knowledge of that love we cannot understand the quality of love that the Lord expects of us. First John 4:7,8, *“Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love.”* It is not that we worship love. God is the origin and spring of the kind of love that seeks the others highest good. What are some of the characteristics of this love of which we are the beneficiaries?

God’s love is universal. John 3:16, *“For God so loved the world...”* Acts 10:34,35, *“Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons but in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.”* Titus 2:11, *“For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men.”* There is no person that is outside the embrace of the love of God. It is not restricted to families, tribes, nations or races. It is extended to all humanity.

God’s love is a sacrificial love. Ephesians 5:1,2, *“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour.”* By His death on the cross, the sacrifice of sacrifices, Deity has demonstrated His love toward man. First John 4:9,10, *“In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.”* The price that was paid for our ransom was the blood of the sacrificial “Lamb of God” (John 1:27) sacrificed at Calvary. Revelation 1:5, *“Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood.”*

God's love is given even though it is undeserved. This is an astonishing quality of God's love. Romans 5:8, *"But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* In our sins we merited nothing except the damnation that awaits those who are lost in sin. But God was not content to let conditions remain like that, but provided for our release from spiritual bondage.

More About His Love

His love is merciful. After defining the Christian's spiritual state before he became a Christian, Paul said in Ephesians 2:4,5, *"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, [by grace ye are saved]."* We are saved by the unmerited favor of God and we are not capable of earning our salvation. This does not negate the necessity of our obedience because obedience is not a way of earning, but is only meeting the conditions whereupon God gives us the gift of salvation. Obedience is the way of receiving. God's commands are not harsh, dictatorial and ruthless, but every command is for our highest good.

God's love is a saving love. Second Thessalonians 2:16, *"Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace."* Salvation, everlasting life, stems from God's love. Paul addressed these words to those he said were *"chosen... to salvation through sanctification."* (Verse 13). To be sanctified means to be cleansed, set apart, and by this manner afforded the provisions of God's love.

God's love is strengthening, bringing victory. It is not an over-protective, softening love that makes man weak and ill-equipped for daily living. Quite the opposite is true. God's love makes conquerors of those who otherwise would be defeated in sin. Romans 8:35-37, *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us."*

God's love is enduring. Romans 8:38,39, *"For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be*

able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This speaks of God’s love for man, especially His children in Christ. Human love is sometimes fickle rather than lasting. It can be crushed, lost or withdrawn. But regardless of situations, changes, circumstances, God never ceases to love any person. This does not mean all will be saved. This does not mean God approves of all one does. But it does mean that God never ceases to seek our highest good.

And Still More

God’s love is rewarding. James 1:12; 2:5, “*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him... Hearken, beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?*” There is that “*crown of righteousness*” that we shall receive when we, like Paul, have fought a good fight, finished our course, and kept the faith. (Second Timothy 4:6-8).

God’s love is chastening at times. Hebrews 12:6, “*For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*” Parents can readily understand this. We often chasten and discipline our children, not because we seek their harm and not because we do not love them, but because we do love them and seek their highest good. They must be guided, trained, rebuked when wrong, and shown the way of right. We may not always know how God chastens us. Through His Word we have His will and that will includes the assurance that He does chasten those whom He loves. Through His providence God is mindful and watchful over His children. His love is of such a quality that it does not withhold essential discipline when needed. It is not indulgent and permissive.

The love of God is universal, sacrificial, undeserved, merciful, saving, strengthening, enduring, rewarding and chastening. How great is the love of God for mankind!

With these thoughts we pray that our understanding of love is enlarged and our appreciation of love will grow, making us better fitted for service before God, both now and in the hereafter. The next lesson shall consider man’s love for God and some prime traits of the love we are to manifest in our own lives.

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Love

Number Three

We turn our attention to love from the viewpoint of human duty to God and others. We shall include a large number of passages of Scripture to learn what the Bible teaches, how it reads, what it includes and specifies regarding love as the Lord expects from man.

Man's Love for God

The New Testament has much to say about man's love for God. This love must be exclusive in nature. 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 10:37, *"He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."* There is room for only one supreme loyalty in the Christian heart and that must be toward Christ. The Lord cannot and will not share first place with anything or anybody. He is the Lord.

Man's love for God must be founded on man's gratitude to God and God's love for man. First John 4:10,19, *"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins... We love him because he first loved us."*

Man's love must be an obedient love. There cannot be a separation of love and obedience. John 14:15, *"If ye love me, keep my commandments."* John 14:21, *"He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me."* John 14:23,24, *"Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words... He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings."* Second John 6, *"And this is love, that we walk after his commandments."* First John 2:3-5, *"And hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected; and hereby we do know that we are in him."* First John 5:2,3, *"By this we know that we love the children of God when we love*

God and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous."

More than a usual number of scriptures have been cited to document the connection between obedience and love because this needs to be impressed upon our minds. Too many have the concept that they can ignore or disobey what God says, but yet claim to love God. The only way we can prove before God that we do love Him is to do what He commands. Saying we love God is insufficient. It requires doing His will. We do not "honk" if we love Jesus, as a bumper sticker once suggested, but we must obey if we love Jesus. This tendency among some to claim to love but refuse to obey is foreign to the truth.

Man's love for God is outgoing, by which we mean that it reaches out and extends to others. First John 4:12,20,21, *"No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us... If a man say, I love God and hateth his brother, he is a liar, for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?... And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also."* There simply is no such thing as loving unless we seek the other's highest good.

This brings us to our next consideration of love, and that is the love Christians are to have for their fellow Christians. Love is the distinguishing badge of the Christian society. First Corinthians 16:14, *"Let all your things be done with charity (love)."* Some dislike the word "charity" as found in the King James Version, possibly because they have become infected with some modern speech perversions to the point that any rendering found in the KJV is rejected by them. But there is a sense in which "charity" conveys more the Christian doctrine than the mere word "love."

Many people consider love as only an emotion without recognizing the necessity of that attitude and emotion doing something. Christian love acts. Christianity conveys not only an attitude but an action which manifests itself. Charity suggests action as well as emotion. Charity is a good selection and should not be hastily set aside. John 13:35, *"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."*

A church where there is bitterness, backbiting, strife and hostility among its members may be called a church, but it is certainly not the kind of church that pleases God. Does it even have the right to call itself a church of Christ if it persists in that

behavior? The world should know the Lord's church for the love brethren have toward each other.

The church is built up by the power of love. Ephesians 4:16, *"From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."* Love is the cement that holds the living stones together. It creates the climate that is conducive to growth. It is the food that nourishes fellowship. Without it churches cannot stand strong but will crumble into pieces.

Love and Leadership

Love is the motivating power for leaders of the church to do their task well. When Paul wrote to brethren in Corinth he reminded them of his love. Second Corinthians 2:4, *"For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you."* When Paul corrected brethren it was not because he disliked them nor hated them. His words were strong and his condemnation severe and certain. But he was motivated to lead them the way he did because of his love for his brethren.

This same kind of love will prohibit leaders from lording it over others, seeking their own prominence and prestige, desiring to dominate. He leads because of love.

This carries over to the attitude followers are to have toward leaders. First Thessalonians 5:13, *"And to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake..."* Sometimes members do not show the right attitude toward their leaders. They heap upon them criticism, resentment, rebellion and then wonder why the leaders do not do better even under the barrage of hostility. There should be a mutual love between leaders and followers. When that does exist, the will of the Lord shall prevail.

Let us now consider the characteristics of love. Romans 12:9, *"Let love be without dissimulation."* This means love must be without pretense, but sincere. First Peter 1:22, *"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently."* Peter is calling for sincere, genuine, unpretended love. Love is not just a surface pleasantness, but an honest and genuine attitude in the heart.

Love is to be without ill-will. Romans 13:10, "*Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*" Love envieth not, is not easily provoked, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, seeks what is good for the other, and never the injury of another (First Corinthians 13).

Christian love is generous. It is a love that gives. Paul told the Corinthians, while also urging them to give on behalf of the poor in Judea, Second Corinthians 8:24, "*Wherefore show ye to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love, and of our boasting on your behalf.*" Love is proven to be true by giving. The mainspring of Christian living is Christian love. Like the love of God who gave (John 3:16), we are to give to God and to those who need our assistance. God did not love because He gave, but He gave because He loved. So should it be with us. Love should provoke generous giving.

More About Love

Christian love is so practical. It is not merely a kindly feeling and a pious thought and good wish. Christian love accomplishes things. Like faith, it works. Hebrews 6:10, "*For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.*" First John 3:17,18, "*But whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*" A love that will not work is as dead as a faith that will not work.

Ephesians 4:2 teaches that love is forbearing. "*I therefore the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.*" Not only are we to refrain from injuring others, as we have noted, but we are to possess that quality of endurance and patience toward one another. Love suffers long and is kind, bears all things, endures all things (First Corinthians 13). This does not suggest we ignore and tolerate evil in each other, but that we are patient and kind as we help one another overcome evil in our lives. Even Christians have to put up with a lot from each other sometimes, but are willing to do so because they love each other.

Never could love be Christian love without the forgiving spirit.

One cannot love without being willing to forgive those who trespass against him. Love never places an obstacle in the path of the wrong-doer who wishes to get right. Christian love is like the love the father manifested toward the prodigal son when the son returned home having repented of his errors. In First Corinthians Paul urged severe action regarding one in immorality. In Second Corinthians the action Paul commanded was sufficient to restore him. Paul said his brethren should forgive him and comfort him, and by doing that they would *"confirm your love toward him."* (Second Corinthians 2:8).

Is Love Blind?

Christian love is not so sentimental that it shuts one's eyes to the faults of others nor fails to be realistic. Love is not blind. Love recognizes faults but loves anyway. Paul wrote sternly to Corinth but regarding faults he said he dealt with them as he did because he loved them.

You have heard it said that love is blind, but not Christian love. Christian love sees things as they are, realistically, but is powerful enough to do whatever is necessary to help overcome faults. It may require rebuke, discipline, or whatever God requires. Love which shuts its eyes to faults and sins in order to avoid unpleasantness is not Christian love because Christian love never shirks responsibility toward other people. Blind love would be harmful, not helpful. Christian love seeks the highest good for others.

Christian love controls the way we use our liberties. Galatians 5:3, *"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."* Ephesians 4:15, *"But speaking the truth in love."* Love is the motive behind speaking the truth and governs the manner of proclaiming it. Love and truth are never contrary, but go hand in hand. Because we love others we will even forego our "rights" if it would be for the benefit of others. Truth is sometimes pleasant, sometimes unpleasant, but always consistent and compatible with seeking one's good.

Love is the bond of Christian fellowship. It is binding. Colossians 2:1,2, *"For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and the Christ."*

It was love one for the other that caused Paul to make a special request for a favor from Philemon concerning a former slave named Onesimus (Philemon 9). *"Yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such a one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ."* We are at liberty to do favors for each other because of love.

Love is the power behind our faith. Galatians 5:6, *"For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love."* Faith works, and love makes it work. Love is the quality that can make the Christian live a mature, whole, complete life, called perfect. 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."* Colossians 3:14, *"And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness."*

Such then are the basic characteristics and products of Christian love. It is all summed up in the phrase that Christian love is seeking the highest good of others. Beyond all question, Christianity is built on love. It is the greatest of all virtues, the primary quality of the religion founded by the Son of God, the umbrella under which all else falls, and is found practical in man's love for God and his fellowman. May God help us love as He has loved us.

† † † † †

What Christianity Does

Should a salesman come to you with a product that was new to you and asked you to buy it, there are several things you would want to know about it. From where did it come? Who made it? How much does it cost? But mostly you would want to know, what does it do? What good is it? What need or desire does it fill? What benefit does it produce?

Many are asking similar questions about the faith of Christ. There may have been a time when most accepted the fact that the faith of Christ was beneficial, but that is not always true today. Enemies of the Lord have done much to sow distrust concerning Christianity. How would you even define Christianity to the non-Christian? We might want to define it much like we

define electricity; that is, in terms of what it does. The World Book Encyclopedia defines electricity this way, "We know what it is by what it does." We can define Christianity the same way.

In our day of the cynic, skeptic, and growing irreligious attitudes, Christianity is often scorned, cast aside, ridiculed, left untried and repudiated, even said to be without value and useless in our day as something irrelevant to our needs. It is said we need something up-to-date, new and modern because we are in the "post-Christian" age. There are reasons why many are reacting to the way of Christ in this negative fashion.

The influence of secularism, humanism, communism, materialism and the confusion of denominationalism have all contributed to this resentful attitude toward Christianity. The ignorance and evil influence of the world places emphasis on man, self, the physical side of life to the neglect and denial of the spirit of man. The frustrations of the sinful world have overcome many and led them to atheism. The church has not adequately conveyed to the world the real nature and benefit of New Testament Christianity.

It may be while we have properly emphasized the faith of Christ in terms of its origin, its Founder, its early history, its doctrine, its costs, we have neglected to tell people what it does and therefore they really have not been informed regarding its essential value. Many who profess to be Christians so live as to detract from Christianity and actually repel others, not showing anything particularly distinctive and beneficial in their lives for being a professed follower of Christ. When the Christian shows it has not done very much for him in living a godly life, how can you expect the non-Christian to be impressed? It is a worthy thought, "If you were arrested for being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you?"

A "Doing" Religion

The Bible makes two points very clear about the faith or religion of Christ. (1) It is a doing religion (Matthew 7:21; James 1:22; Acts 1:1). As Jesus both taught and did, we are to follow His steps (First Peter 2:21). (2) Christians are different because of what they do and what they refrain from doing. They are a peculiar, distinctive people because of their manner of life and relationship to God (Titus 2:14; Galatians 6:10; James 4:17). They learn to abhor evil, abstain from it, and hold fast to the good (First Thessalonians 5:21,22). Though in the world, they

are not of the world (Romans 12:1,2; First John 2:15).

Let us consider a few things Christianity, when believed and obeyed, will do for mankind. Let us see the need it fills and recognize how essential to our welfare the faith of Christ is.

Salvation

First, it is the only faith that fills the greatest need mankind has and that is salvation from sin. This is true whether anyone realizes it or not. Its truthfulness is not dependent upon its acceptance. In a day when there is much emphasis on social reform, social revolution, social concern and change, most have overlooked this greatest contribution of Christ. We all sin (Romans 3:23; 5:12), and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). We cannot redeem ourselves by ourselves and must have a Savior. There is only one Savior and that is Christ (Acts 4:12; John 8:32; 14:6). Meeting or failing to meet this need determines our eternal destiny. Is it not strange that this greatest need of mankind is usually placed on the back shelf even as people grope in darkness and confusion, failing to realize that being free from sin is the first step in overcoming those things that threaten, harass and destroy mankind? At the root of man's ills is his spiritual poverty.

Should a person conquer the world, solve his physical problems, and not save his soul, he has failed. "*What shall it profit...?*" (Mark 8:36). While the Word of God is his lamp and guide (Psalm 119:105), if he shuns it, he cannot solve his problems. He has not the capacity to direct his own steps properly (Jeremiah 10:23), and he will only deceive himself into thinking a way is right when it is wrong (Proverbs 14:12). "*Thou hast the words of eternal life,*" Peter said of Christ in John 6:66-69. There is no other to whom we can go.

In This Life

But the contribution of the faith of Christ is not confined to the benefits in the next life exclusive of this one. Should one ever think the Word of God is irrelevant, he should consider the host of blessings derived from it as listed in the longest chapter of the Bible, Psalm 119. Some say that Paul never preached to a nuclear scientist or a space age person. What if he did not? Man's spiritual needs have not changed, nor will they. Man does not need a new and different gospel, but he needs to learn and

apply the gospel God gives. Of course, if a person is sick and he is ignorant of or refused to take the curative medicines he has no right to expect benefit. But he does not have the right to denounce the medicine either as if there is no cure. Most are casting Christ away, not knowing what they are refusing, then accepting counterfeits and distortions that cannot provide what he needs. This is really an unfair approach to Christ.

The faith of Christ deals with one of mankind's most threatening ills and that is the domestic problem concerning the home, marriage, divorce, and the most intimate relationships of life. None who are aware of the realities of our time would deny the magnitude of the problems. What is more needful than for husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25), and wives to love their husbands and their children (Titus 2:4)? While not going into depth here for lack of space, we affirm there is no marital problem for which the Word of God does not provide the solution.

There is the issue of rearing children. The parent-child relationship is taught in Scripture. What is more needful than for parents to train their children in God's way (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:4), and for children to obey their parents? (Ephesians 6:1). To honor parents is a divine directive and if obeyed, many of the stresses and ills of our time would soon dissipate. Juvenile and adult delinquency is traceable to violations of God's Word in this area of life.

Man to Man

In man's relationship with his fellowman, we are taught to love our neighbor as ourselves. We would seek the other's highest good if we applied God's will. So many seem to think that the "Golden Rule" (Matthew 7:12) has been repealed or never existed. Consider if you will what a beneficial revolution the world would experience if all would bend their efforts to follow even this one teaching!

As nation wars against nation, and the faith of Christ is not a political government, and while self-defense is surely allowed by Scripture both individually and collectively, nations could live in peace one with the other if the citizens thereof would attune their lives, attitudes and ambitions to that which Jesus taught.

Drug addiction, especially the number one drug problem in America which is alcoholism, have solutions only in the way of Christ. The teaching to not abuse the body and prohibition of

the consumption of alcoholic beverages are so relevant and needful today. While some wail and cry over the plight of mankind because of these abuses, they either do not know or will not apply the solutions that the Son of God has authorized. Many are busy applying social "Band-Aids" to these spiritual cancers. But the way of Christ would solve them.

We are confronted with world-wide racial strife. But God taught that He is no respecter of persons on that basis (Acts 10:34,35), and there can be no oneness and unity in the human family without Christ (Galatians 3:28). We are physically brothers (Acts 17:26), but we shall never consider each other as we should until we can dispose of the hatred, prejudice and suspicion we hold against each other. These hideous qualities must be replaced with fairness and respect for human dignity, but that will not occur until we follow the teaching of Christ. While we are not all alike and there is no sin to note our differences, we waste our efforts to remove the enmity between men by marches, riots, suppression, making and breaking laws, nightriders, etc. Such never avails the desired result but the will of Christ in the heart will produce solutions.

God's Remedy

Who can deny that our nation, as well as nations around the world, has been beset with a tidal wave of lawlessness. We are told that one of six youths under eighteen years of age have a police record. While this seems astoundingly high, we have to be mindful of the crime that sweeps across the human family. We can rightly assign many reasons for this, but only the teaching and obedience to the will of Christ will produce solutions in this area. Capital punishment, which God has ordained governments to use against criminals, is being dismissed, or inconsistently applied, and replaced by a misguided "compassion" for the criminal as opposed to the concern for the victim and potential victims. Christians are taught to obey the laws of the land. "*Fear God and honor the king...*" (First Peter 2:17). Who could suggest this would not improve the quality of human relationships and produce better societies if obeyed?

We see millions of people flooding the mental hospitals, suffering nervous breakdowns, burdened with worry and anxiety, falling beneath the pressures of daily living. Too many are too busy striving for the wind of material gain, following a

false value system, attempting to remove guilt without repentance, allowing their consciences to destroy them rather than correcting their sense of values. Solomon teaches that such striving is vanity and vexation of spirit. Seeking God's kingdom and His righteousness is the assurance of provision (Matthew 6:33). What could be more relevant and useful than the solution to these maladies of the mind and life?

Evil Hearts

At the source of man's ills is an evil heart filled with greed, lust, pride, envy, immorality. The Word teaches the need of a change of heart. Man's life does not consist of his possessions (Luke 12:15). From the heart comes the issues of life (Proverbs 4:23), so we must be more careful concerning what we think (Proverbs 23:7). We must let our mind dwell on the good (Philippians 4:8), and set our hearts on things above (Colossians 3:2). If we would put to death the old man of sin (Romans 6:6; Ephesians 4:22), and renew the spirit of our minds (Ephesians 4:23), pride would be replaced with humility, envy replaced by rejoicing with those who rejoice, purity would replace immorality, and giving would displace greed. Who says that the faith of Christ is not beneficial and needful for our day?

When people follow the faith of Christ, if their poverty is caused by their own laziness, they will learn to work because the gospel teaches if one will not work neither should he eat (Second Thessalonians 3:10). The rich will learn to share with those who are in need. Money by itself has never and can never win the war against poverty. There are too many spiritual factors involved to leave spiritual values out of consideration of a solution. Talents given and talents used are a part of serving the Lord and one another.

What could be more useful to humanity than the warnings against the pitfalls into which many fall? Should not the down-trodden be encouraged, brotherly love exhibited, provisions made for family stability and community peace? The gospel of Christ will not only cure the disease of sin, but offers many preventive measures that, when followed, will allow mankind to avoid so much heartache and tragedy that his sins would otherwise bring upon him. Christianity will cause him to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, house the homeless and attend the sick.

The dread blight of hypocrisy is so evident in our world. Not

only is there hypocrisy in religion, but the deceptive pretense is evident in every field of human endeavor. Basic and fundamental honesty is a scarce commodity in society. Sincerity and truth are often lacking in dealings between people. What is more relevant to man's needs than to be able to rely on the integrity of others? Yet, even among many who profess to be Christians there is a near void of plain old-fashioned truth and honor such as God would have all men partake.

The Best Will Rise

Christianity will bring out the best in an individual. When death pursues each one, where else can one find the comfort, hope, consolation and security that the promises of God through Christ offers him? Where else can you find the reason to life and the motivation to live it profitably as God has designed it except in the way of Christ? Where else is there such emphasis on the dignity of human life? What teaches both young and old how to live and how to die? How could anyone question the benefit of the faith of Christ for our world?

Christianity teaches men to have patience in tribulation, and gives him that which he cannot provide for himself. It recreates him in the image of Christ, washing him clean by the Lord's blood and guiding him aright through life. No philosophy, no human theology, no other religion can offer such blessings and fulfill them as the faith of Christ. Every command God gives man is for man's good. No other faith really gives us the reason for being better than that faith that teaches we are created in the image of God. We are here for a purpose and we have a mission to accomplish. We stand accountable before God and we face the judgment to be followed by heaven or hell.

Yes, every realm of human activity that is proper is made even better when one follows Christ. Both history and Scriptures cry this message. His way is the more excellent way because of what it does. It is more glorious when we realize it is exclusively the faith that God approves. We cannot stop wars with mere weapons, nor crime with law. Hate will not be conquered with secular knowledge nor love created by legislation. But in Christ all these blessings can be ours.

What does the faith of Christ do? It makes man a real man, not just a highly evolved animal that some contend we are. It makes him fit for association with Deity. It not only offers the solutions to man's earthly ills and the best life in this world one

can have, but all that and heaven, too.

Wherever, whenever, whoever walks in the light as He is in the light is blessed of God. What the faith of Christ has done for others, it will do for you, even all who come to God's Son. But how can we expect His blessings if we remain aloof and apart from Him? Will you see these truths and obey God?

† † † † †

A PREACHER PROBLEM

This is not written to excuse brethren who preach but an attempt to focus attention on a matter he and all brethren must face. A preacher probably runs the greatest risk of anyone of being accused and being guilty of Phariseeism. I specify the characteristic named in 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.*" This is especially hazardous for preachers because "saying" is their prime occupation in life. No responsibility takes priority over public proclamation of the gospel.

"*Preach the word*" is the apostolic admonition. That which is to be preached is the "*perfect law of liberty.*" Preachers are not to proclaim opinions as Christ's doctrine nor present themselves as if they were the standard by which all must be measured. His message must be a "*thus saith the Lord,*" but he may have as many difficulties as the next human being in living up to what he must proclaim as infallible truth. Surely, this accounts somewhat for the emphasis on the responsibility of teachers stated in James 3:1, "*Be not many of you masters (teachers), my brethren, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.*"

We have all urged preaching brethren to "practice what they preach," and good admonition this is. We have all understood the inherent weakness in the attitude that says, "Do as I say and not as I do." But when we get right down to the bare facts of reality, every preacher must include some degree of that element in his work.

Who can say with the confidence of inspired Paul, "*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.*"

(Philippians 4:9). Must we not provide some qualification because of our failings? Only Christ harmonized to perfection that which He would “do and teach.” So we see the dilemma in which one who preaches finds himself. It is not his problem alone, however.

Finding problems is easy. Where is the solution? Unfortunately some who preach have succumbed to the temptation to alter their message to fit themselves and accept the sins of men. Recognizing their inability to live perfectly, they withdraw from declaring “*the whole counsel of God*” because they cannot completely live up to it themselves. But this does not solve the problem, but actually aggravates it because it lowers the standard toward which we all must strive. Some think to condemn is to make sinful judgments and since none is perfect all condemnation of sin must be abandoned. But we do not judge wrongfully, however, when we proclaim judgments God has already made and revealed. Yes, we must constantly work to remove our “beam” but if preachers abandon the exposure of the “mote” until all of his own faults are completely removed, neither he nor anyone else will continue to preach, positively or negatively, the gospel of Christ.

As much as possible, more than others, a preacher must do his utmost to live as he preaches. But he must recognize his own faults, strive to grow as he must, and brethren must respect the fact he is also a faltering human being like they are. One preacher complimented his mother by saying, “She practices what I preach.”

With the help of the Lord and encouragement from brethren and family, plus a determined personal effort, preachers are more likely to be less like the Pharisees in this matter, even though they will ever stand in jeopardy of this inconsistency by the very nature of his humanity and weaknesses and his task of preaching the perfect way. JWB

It has well been said, “Immodest clothing reveals more than one might think. It reveals disrespect for the Word of God and a rebellious heart as well as a spirit of disobedience.”

The New Hermeneutics

We have another heresy among us. Hermeneutics has to do with understanding the Scriptures. Some have become "educated" in man's philosophies and have decided we need a new approach to the Bible. Seeking what they call unity (actually it is only agreeing to disagree rather than unity), and seeing that all are not united, some think we need to do something that will produce unity. So they have decided to look at the Bible differently. Instead of taking God at His Word they contend we can place whatever meaning we wish on whatever is said and everyone accept whatever anybody else decides. This sounds ridiculous but it is only because the new approach is ridiculous. What we should want is truth more than unity. To have unity at the sacrifice of truth is heresy.



JAMES W. BOYD

Contending the Bible is no pattern for Christianity, this allows everybody to go whatever direction one might wish. To think that our "Christian" schools are contaminated with such malarkey is heartbreaking. But such false doctrine flows like water after a downpour among the elite "scholars" of our schools. No wonder truth suffers!

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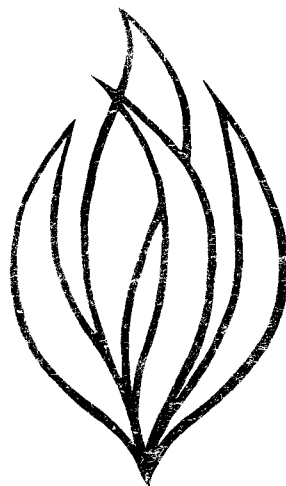
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A Burning Fire



"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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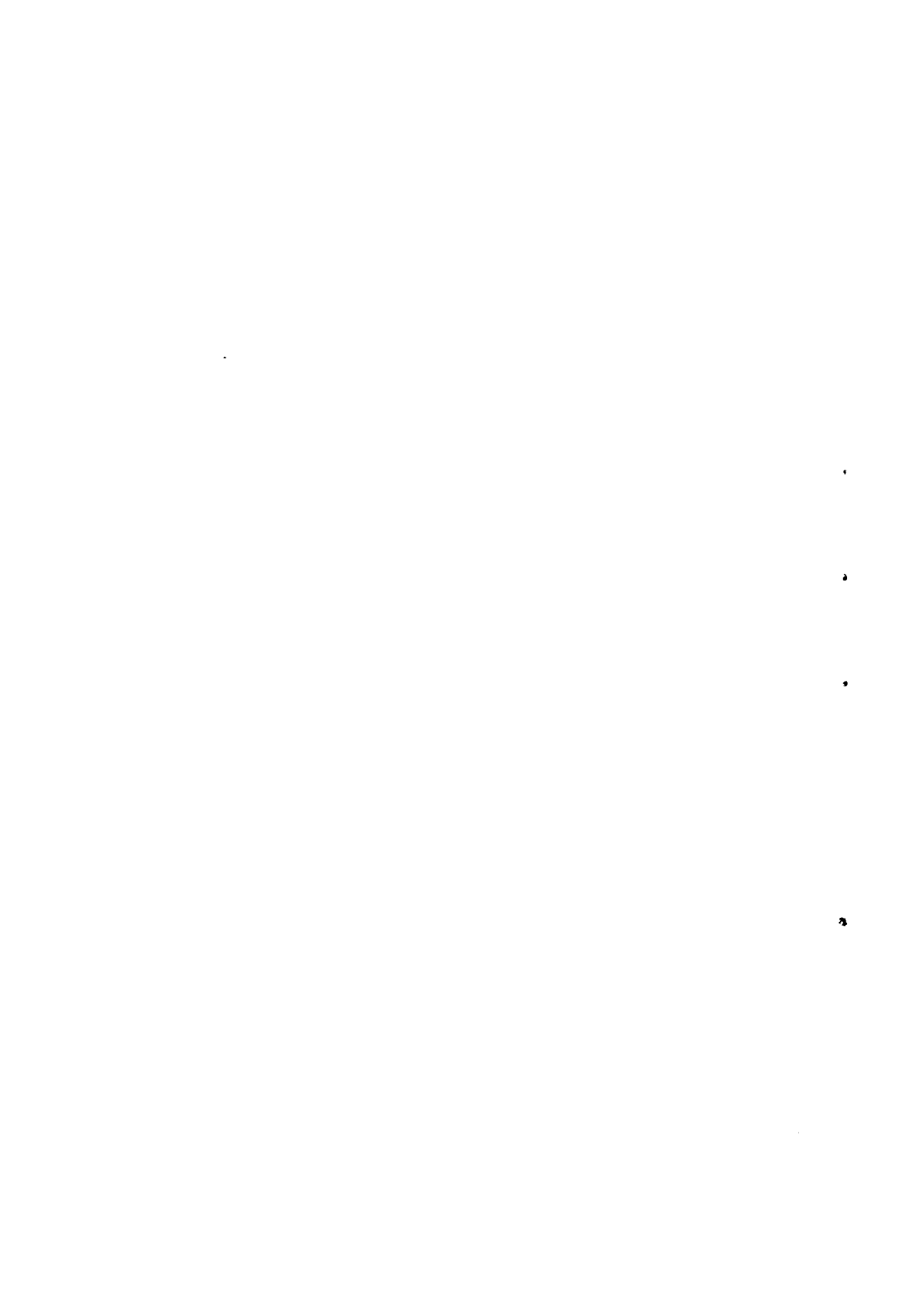
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The Obedient Spirit

In Numbers, chapter thirteen, we read the report that the twelve spies gave after they reviewed the land off Canaan as Moses directed them. Before continuing in this lesson let me urge that you read from your Bible Numbers 13:25-33. After forty days on their mission the spies reported that the land was a land that flowed with milk and honey. But they also had a negative report concerning the inhabitants of the land, saying that they were giants, had walled cities, and they made the Israelites appear by comparison to be but grasshoppers.

The report was very discouraging to the people of Israel. *"And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God that we had died in this wilderness!"* (Numbers 14:2).

Two spies, Joshua and Caleb, gave a different slant to the report. *"And Joshua, the son of Nun, and Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes and they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us unto this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord; neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defense is departed from them and the Lord is with us; fear them not."* (Numbers 14:6-9). But the people reacted against them so strongly that they wanted to stone Joshua and Caleb. The actions and attitudes of the Israelites and the ten spies demonstrated a spirit of disobedience to God.

In the New Testament Paul wrote of the Gentiles, *"Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience."* (Ephesians 2:2). He warned those of such a spirit, *"Let no man deceive you with vain words; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience."* (Ephesians 5:6)

Israel was made to wander in the wilderness one year for each day the spies were gone; hence, the forty years in the wilderness. All those twenty years old and upward died in the wilderness except two.

But Joshua and Caleb were of a different spirit. *"But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land wherein he went; and his seed shall possess it."* (Numbers 14:24).

What Is Obedience?

Obedience to God requires more than an outward performance of mechanical acts such as a soldier might perform at the command of his general. He might do exactly what he is told to do, but hate every minute and movement involved. But so long as he carries out his orders it is said that he has obeyed his commander. But obedience to God involves more than that. Obedience to God must come from the heart. *"Know ye not that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to 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 which was delivered you."* (Romans 6:16,17). Obedience to God involves attitude as well as action.

When we worship, the heart is involved. Jesus said, *"God is a Spirit; and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."* (John 4:24). The heart is involved again in living the righteous life as noted in Second Timothy 2:22. *"Flee youthful lusts; but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart."* Even our service before men is to be as service before God because of the heart. *"Not with eyeservice, as men pleasers; but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."* (Ephesians 6:6).

Obedience means doing the right thing, but with the right motive, intent, understanding, voluntarily, willingly, and with a desire to please God. So we must develop in the heart the right attitude toward the commands of God to us and possess an obedience spirit.

Do you have an obedient spirit? How can we know if we have an obedient spirit? What are the marks of an obedient spirit? A closer look at Joshua and Caleb in the events of long ago will help us see what is the obedient spirit we all must have and display.

Humility

It means having a spirit of humility, submission, denying self. The proud egotist never bows to the will of another, even to God. He is all for self, having to have his own way. *"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ... being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."* (Philippians 2:5,8). Our attitude must be, *"Not my will but thine be done."* As Jesus taught, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."* (Luke 9:23).

Joshua called the refusal to go up to Canaan a rebellion against God. It was his desire that they obey God regardless of the cost to themselves. He was humble enough to put God before himself.

Even if Alone

An obedient spirit also means doing what God says whether anyone else is willing to obey or not. While we are not to parade our faith around for others to see in order to praise us, or do what we do simply to be different, we must do what God says is right whether we stand alone or in the company of just a few or many. Joshua and Caleb had to stand alone. So did Daniel, Moses and nearly every other faithful servant of God. Doing right just because others do right is not really having an obedient spirit. Those that will obey just because others do will likely disobey just because others do. While we do not dismiss the value or the power of a good influence, our reason to obey must be more than simply obeying because somebody else does. We need to be as was Joshua at the close of his life when he said, *"Choose ye this day whom ye will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."* (Joshua 24:15).

Have you ever noticed that sometimes when people have a falling out one might say he will repent or forgive if his adversary will? Or one might say he will obey the gospel if his wife or her husband obeys. What do you mean, "If somebody else does?" The spirit of obedience means you will obey, you will do what is right, even if nobody else does. The attitude we must have is, "What would God have me to do?" We are not to ask, "What are others going to do?" It is easier to do right when others do right, but we must do right anyway.

By His Will

An obedient spirit means doing what God commands whether it pleases us and our personal whims and preferences or not. Whether we even think it is reasonable or not does not enter into it. It is not the spirit of obedience to obey God "up to a point."

We can be sure that every divine directive is for our good. But even if we cannot see, we should obey nonetheless. One might say, "But I don't see why I must to this or that." So what? If we have the spirit of obedience we will obey anyway. Cain could have argued that way. Nadab and Abihu had that attitude. Joshua could have said the same thing when told to march around Jericho so many times. Naaman could have quibbled that way when told to go to Jordan and wash. Christ might have stated something like that when He had to go to the cross.

Some today rebel at being baptized in water because they say they do not see any sense in it. That is not the point. We must obey whatever God tells us to do whether it appears reasonable to us or not. To obey just when it suits me or you is not true obedience. This would make man a judge of God's commands, putting man before God.

Some sons were instructed by the father to plant grain in three fields. One field was to be in corn, another in barley and the third in wheat. The sons agreed with the decision about the first two fields, but thought oats would be better in the third field and acted accordingly. How many times did they obey their father? Not once! They always acted as they saw fit. That is not the spirit of obedience.

Not Just "Get By"

The spirit of obedience does not allow for doing the least that one can do in the service of God. Some think they can "get by" with doing as little as possible. They will not do one thing more. What would you think of a parent who never did anything for the child more than just what was absolutely necessary and demanded of the parent? How much would you say a husband loved his wife if he never did more for her than what he thought he just had to do? Would not something vital be missing?

Why do some children of God wish to serve God with that attitude? The spirit of obedience asks, "How much can I do?" It does not ask, "How little can I do and get by?" It never asks, "Do I have to attend all the services of the church?" "Do I have to give again and again?" Absenteeism is a symptom of an even worse spiritual malady that absenteeism reflects. It reflects heart trouble. It lacks the spirit of obedience.

A man once asked me if I thought Hebrews 10:25 means he had to come on Wednesday night. I told him it did. But even if it did not, he would likely lose his soul because of the sorry attitude he had toward worship and Bible study. He had not considered it that way previously.

Against Opposition

An obedient spirit means obeying God even when you meet opposition. People of God will meet opposition, even persecution (Second Timothy 3:12). It has been said that the spies and Israelites had a "grasshopper" complex. Joshua and Caleb did not minimize the difficulties facing them. But they had a different spirit about them. *"Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it."* (Numbers 13:30).

What we must ask is, "What is right?" before we ask, "What are the consequences of doing right?" Some count the cost of following Christ to see if they want to follow Him. But others count the cost to learn what it will require of them so they can do it. They have already decided they will follow Christ regardless of the cost or opposition.

Opposition can come from friends, families and many sources. As you study the lives of the faithful of God they all faced opposition. Yet, they did what God wanted them to do because they had the spirit of obedience. Daniel, Moses, Nehemiah, John the Baptist, Paul, name them and see if that is not the case with them.

Love

The spirit of obedience says, "I will obey God because of my love for Him." Jesus said, "*If ye love me, keep my commandments.*" (John 14:15). "*And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?*" (Luke 6:46). "*For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not grievous.*" (First John 5:3).

I have seen bumper stickers that read, "Honk if you love Jesus." Friend, any old goose can honk. You do not show you love Jesus the same way you get a dog out of the road. You do not show you love Jesus by such trivia and parading of nonsense. You show you love Jesus by doing His will.

There are commands to obey to become a Christian and commands to obey to be a faithful Christian. We must do what He says with the right attitude, motive, intent and understanding. In other words, we must have that spirit that says, "*Not my will but thine be done.*" We must do what is right even if others do not. We must do what God says even if we do not like it or know why He commands it. We must do all we can and not as little as we can. We must do what God says in spite of opposition. We must obey because we love Him as He first loved us. That is what it means to possess an obedient spirit; the kind of spirit that will enable us to live with God eternally.

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The Face of the Lord

Psalm 27:8, "*When thou saidest, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek.*"

The Bible often speaks of the face of the Lord. John 4:24 teaches that God is not a physical being, but "*God is a Spirit.*" Yet, to assist us in knowing God, God has revealed Himself in terms that allow us to understand Him as best as our limitations will allow. He uses what is linguistically called anthropomorphism, meaning that God has used the traits and features of man to describe Himself. This is to impress upon us that God is a real person. He speaks of His face.

Deity became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ (First John 1:14). Man can know God because God is revealed to man by the face of Christ. Second Corinthians 4:5,6, "*For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*" Jesus said, "*He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.*" (John 14:9). This means one can learn of God by learning through Christ.

The physical features of the face of Christ remain unknown to man. There have been many imaginations portrayed in paintings, but there are no valid actual or literal impressions or descriptions of His face. But we must not shut our eyes to His face because Scripture tells us important things about the face of the Lord. The face of the Lord speaks primarily of His character, a symbol of the true personality of Deity, especially as seen in Christ.

Against Evil

First Peter 3:12 teaches, "*The face of the Lord is against them that do evil.*" Such are the evidences in both Old and New Testaments. Consider Eden when mankind sinned and turned from Paradise and the tree of life because of his transgression. The flood in the time of Noah gives evidence of God's face against evil when the wicked were destroyed. Sodom and Gomorrah stand as witnesses

of this truth. In the New Testament we read where Christ twice cleansed the temple in Jerusalem, being filled with holy and righteous anger against those who had turned the house of the Lord into a den of thieves. That God's face is against them that do evil is seen in the judgment scene and the sentences to be pronounced by the Lord on the evil and good (Matthew 25:41,46).

Religious teachers generally agree that during that period of history called the Dark Ages when Romanism dominated so much of the world that the anger of God was stressed to the neglect of His love and compassion. For the past century the love, kindness and compassion of God has been stressed to the neglect of the Lord's anger against sin. People no longer fear punishment nor the wrath of God. It is wrong to think of God as an over-indulgent grandfather who raises no opposition to sin. Yes, our God is good and loves everybody. But God does not love evil and He does not approve whatever people do. God is love but this does not allow man to carry on a flirtation with sin. Love is not blind permissiveness. The need of our age concerning the knowledge of God is to know that God is love and that God is just.

Must Accept Both

Paul taught, Romans 11:22, "*Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God...*" We cannot have one without the other because they go together. While we thrill at His holiness, purity and righteousness, these very traits are the reason He is against the evildoer. The attitude of the world is not to be too disturbed by sin. This in itself is a reason to be disturbed. Sin destroys mankind. What a plight one is in to have the face of the Lord against him.

Nothing stirs God more than sin, even more than physical distress. When Jesus healed the man of palsy recorded in Matthew 9:1-8, He first dealt with the man's spiritual malady before turning attention to his physical distress. A physical ailment is tragic, but not near as much as spiritual condemnation. A mark of one's godliness is the degree of his pain at sin. The people on Pentecost were pricked in their hearts because they recognized they had sinned. We should be like God. Psalm 45:7, "*Thou lovest righteousness and hateth wickedness.*"

His Determination

Luke 9:51, "*He stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.*" This passage has primary reference to the direction Jesus traveled as He went toward the city. But the direction of His face at that time reveals a quality of character. Jesus was on His way to face the last days of His earthly ministry, including His arrest, betrayal, humiliation, mockery, suffering and death on the cross. Even so, His face was set stedfastly, immovably, toward Jerusalem. He was going to deliberately enter the city, fully determined to do the will of the Father and committed to provide the salvation of mankind. His time had come. He had foretold of these hours many times even as God's prophets before Him had done. As He later prayed, "*Thy will be done.*"

Sometimes the enemies of Jesus present Him as a weak, withdrawn, fearful, effeminate, shy person, lacking in resolve and void of the true spirit of greatness. But what does one see in the face of Jesus? He strides unflinchingly, undisturbed, undismayed with calmness, courage and poise that goes with commitment. There are few moments in the life of Christ on earth when His glory radiated more.

His Brilliance

Matthew 17:2, "*And was transfigured before them, and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.*" Such was the countenance of Jesus when transfigured (changed) on that unnamed mount in Palestine in the presence of God, Moses, Elijah and His own apostles. In but a few days He would experience the darkest hours of His earthly life. But when matters were at their worst the Lord was brilliant and radiant, physically and spiritually. Someone has said of devoted Christians, "When the world is at its worst the Christian will be at his best." Such is the imitation of Jesus. His face was as the sun.

Why this extraordinary radiance and at this time? It was because of the events surrounding it. His Deity was again acknowledged. The Father said, "*This is my beloved*

Son," as He had done at the time of Jesus' baptism by John. It was a genuine glorification and identification of Jesus.

It was a time of a divinely directed proclamation of His majesty. Second Peter 1:16-18, "*For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honor and glory when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount,*" Never again could the glory of Christ be questioned.

It was a time of recognition of the superiority and authority of Jesus Christ. He was superior to all laws and dispensations of the past, even the greatest messengers that came before Him, such as Moses the lawgiver and Elijah the prophet. They were not on equality with Him. It was Jesus to whom all must now pay allegiance and give heed. Of Him God said, "*Hear ye him.*" His face was dazzling and bright to accompany the brilliant proclamations made concerning Him on this occasion.

A Smitten Face

This same face of Jesus, physically speaking, was smitten by His enemies. They spit on His face and bruised Him as they proceeded to kill Him. Matthew 26:67, "*Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands.*" Because of who He was, what He taught, His perfect life, His redeeming message, His face was despised by the wicked people then and now. It is beyond our vocabulary to adequately supply descriptions of the infamous injustices the face of our Lord suffered and endured.

But someday we shall come face to face with the face of our Lord. This will be the day of judgment. We shall know the dazzling nature revealing His majesty. We shall behold a face belonging to the One whose personality and character has been revealed to us, even the face that was mistreated in order that we might be saved. "Face to face with Christ my Savior! Face to face, what will

it be? When with rapture I behold Him; Jesus Christ who died for me."

Face to Face

On that day each of us shall stand face to face with Christ. We then must face the facts revealed concerning Him. We must face the commands He has given. We will face the promises He offered and the threats He warned. What will our face-to-face meeting be? Will it be like the time He turned His face toward Peter after Peter had denied Him? (Luke 22:61). *"The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter."* Or will it be like the time when Stephen saw His face as he died under the stones that took his life. Stephen said, *"But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."* (Acts 7:55,56). Our face-to-face meeting and the nature of it will be determined by what we do regarding Jesus Christ in this life.

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Daniel, The Boy Who Stood Like A Man

The reading of Daniel, chapter one, is essential to this lesson. Please take your Bible and postpone the study until you have read the passage.

The time of the lesson was when Judah was in Babylonian captivity, having been taken there in three stages: one, under Jehoiakim; then Jehoiachin; then Zedekiah. Daniel was among those taken in the first deportation.

He was also among the young men selected for special training by the Babylonians because he possessed the qualities which made him good material. He was without blemish, strong physically, well favored, one who got along well with others, skillful, wise, with better than

average knowledge and understanding, the kind of lad who could stand before kings with composure. He was a young man of great promise and potential alongside others who were chosen.

Involved in his training was the change of names. Daniel's name was changed to Beltashazzar (not to be confused with King Belshazzar). Also the training included a certain diet, food and drink that was set before them. They were taught the Chaldean language and ways. It was with regard to their diet where we see the manly characteristics of this young lad come to the surface.

A Forced Choice

Being a Jew, there were certain foods forbidden him lest he defile himself. He was forced to make a choice. If he ate he would violate God's law. If he did not eat he ran the risk of disfavor of his captors with unknown and uncertain consequences. Let us understand the nature of his alternatives. It was not left to Daniel to decide what was right and wrong. God had already decided that. It was not a question of knowledge with him because he knew the law of God. It was simply a question of whether he would obey God or not.

This is much the same decision confronting people today. God has decided and revealed in His Word right and wrong. Many times people know what God has said. They simply must decide whom to serve. In the comfort and security of our situations we may at first think Daniel's decision should have been an easy one. But consider the pressures upon him. He could reason that he was in a strange land and not there by choice. What else could he do except comply with the wishes of his captors? The king's servants had commanded it. Dare he defy them? He had already been told he would risk himself and others if he disobeyed their directions. Furthermore, who would ever know? It seemed that most everyone else was going along with the command. Why should he be different. He could have considered doing this thing just once in order to relieve a difficult situation with intentions to obey God hereafter. All of these excuses and rationalizations could have been suggested by him. These

are the same kind of pressures facing people who consider serving God today.

Sometimes we get the idea that only the young are beset with pressure from their peers and situations. These pressures follow us all the days of our lives. If we do not learn to handle them while young we will likely be subverted by them somewhere down the line.

His Greatness

Daniel's greatness is seen in verse eight. *"But Daniel purposed in his heart he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank..."* Daniel purposed in his heart he would obey God rather than disobey Him. He made up his mind to do right even in difficult conditions. Here is an example of godly manhood and strength. Regardless of what losses may beset him or others, whatever be the consequences to himself or others, with him it was , *"Thy will be done,"* and he was determined not to waver from it. God was first, last and always in Daniel's decisions. How is it with you and me? Do we have this same disposition?

Yes, he counted the cost, not to see if he would obey God, but only to learn what God expected. Whatever the cost, he would obey God.

We are made to wonder where Daniel learned to take such a righteous stand. We are not specifically told. But we know that he could have learned it only from the will of God. Somebody had taught him and that somebody had done a splendid job of it. We know he could not have learned it by being indulged in sin and folly in his earlier days. He would not have so learned being allowed to "do his own thing" and go his own way. Nor could he have learned this stand by following the counsels of this world that teach to conform and get ahead at whatever cost to the truth. The Jews were taught to teach their young and somebody did what they were supposed to have done with Daniel. How we sin against our children to fail to give them the same kind of stalwart and unmovable strength of righteousness.

God Is Mindful

Let us not take lightly the statements of verses nine, seventeen, nineteen and twenty where God promised blessings and provisions to those who obeyed Him. Where do people get the idea that God is not aware of His own and that He fails to provide for them? When people do right, God knows it. When they decide the righteous path, God supports them in it. We see it in the life of Daniel. We see it in the promises of Christ (Matthew 6:33), and we have even seen it in our own lives. When Daniel made the decision first to follow the will of the Lord, then God acted on his behalf. Provisions were made to enable Daniel to remain faithful. But notice, he had to make his decision first. Then came the blessings of God.

Lessons to Learn

There are certain lesson we must draw from this account. It is always right to do right and always wrong to do wrong. It is never right to do wrong and never wrong to do right. Ultimately, we never lose anything of lasting value when we do right and stand up on the side of God's truth. Regardless of what it costs us, we are always more blessed than the losses we suffer.

We learn that God will provide for those who stand up for His way. It is never to our advantage to yield to temptations and pressures to do wrong. Regardless of the consequences, right-doing is better than wrong-doing. In our day of liberalism modernism various "isms" within and without the family of God, the theories of evolution, humanism, immorality, mass confusion, attacks on the Bible, digression in the church, the raging of the heathen on every hand, we must learn to stand. We must develop the same spiritual backbone that Daniel possessed and displayed. God has not promised ease and comfort in service to Him. What He has promised is expressed with the following poem.

God has not promised skies always blue,
Flower-strewn pathways all our lives through,
God hath not promised sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.
God hath not promised we shall not know

Toil and temptation, trouble and woe.
He hath not told us we shall not bear
Many a burden; many a care.
But God hath promised strength for the day,
Rest for the laborer, light for the way,
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, and undying love.

How wonderful for each of us if we would develop
the same noble virtue exhibited by Daniel on this occasion.
Would we not be better servants of the God of heaven?

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Men Against Jesus

One of our fondest desires is to know Jesus and understand His work and His religion. We can be assisted in this when we also understand His opponents. You can know a person, a movement or an idea not only by its friends but also by its enemies. We wish to take a look at some who chose to oppose Christ, especially observing why they sought to destroy Him and His teaching. Basically, the same reasons that cause people to oppose Him while he was on earth are the reasons His cause suffers opposition today.

It is truly difficult to understand why there was such hostility and venomous hatred toward Him. Why should anyone who lived such a life of service, love, kindness, good deeds and sympathy toward others incur such savage resistance from anyone? Yet, it began early in his life and grew in intensity with the passing of time and events. Again, we can generally say that His opposition was motivated among those who transgressed what He taught. They can be divided into three major groups; (1) the scribes and Pharisees, (2) the Sadducees, (3) and the priests and elders of the people.

Scribes and Pharisees

Opposition to Jesus that arose early and stayed most persistent came from the scribes and Pharisees. To

understand why we must understand how they considered the Jewish law. To them there were the Ten Commandments, the Pentateuch, and their oral traditions. The first two came from God while the third consisted of man's opinions and doctrines. Yet, traditions were the most important with them. They made it their business to make rules and regulations, declaring them binding on everyone, enforcing them with unrelenting zeal as if such rules were God's laws. They were not beyond violating God's written laws to uphold their human traditions and opinions. One such instance of this was noted by Jesus and recorded in Matthew 15:1-9 regarding washing hands and honoring parents. Not only did they assign certain washings, but they had to be done a certain way. They refused to sustain parents saying their funds were already committed, even though God commanded honoring their parents even to providing for them. They considered healing a man on the Sabbath Day a violation of their traditions, even though the law allowed even relieving animals in distress.

As long as one showed outward conformity to their doctrines, they considered him all right regardless of the condition of the heart. Their faith was one of human legalism, external form, designed for the expert and professional religionist. They looked upon the sinner and publican with contempt and as being untouchable, being a disgrace to have anything whatever to do with them, even to helping them. They were self-righteous, narrowing God's love only to themselves.

Jesus had a head-on collision with these people. He taught God's will was above any and all human laws and opinions. His religion was for the common man; even the poor had the gospel preached to them. He acknowledged the propriety of certain outward piety, but condemned the hypocrisy being exhibited. He stressed internal purity as well as external ritual. He condemned their self-righteousness and urged self-denial. He taught that God loved the Jew, but He also loved all men, even sinners, and desired that all be saved. He did not teach God's approval of all, but He did teach God's love for all. Jesus could not have crossed and contradicted the scribes and Pharisees much more than He did if that conflict had been His primary goal in life.

Sadducees

The Sadducees were the aristocrats, the wealthy, the politically powerful and materially well-to-do people, the "high society" of Jerusalem and Judaism. They were bitter enemies and rivals of the scribes and Pharisees, denying the resurrection and judgment to come, rejecting oral laws as well as written laws. There were written laws they would accept, but only portions of those. Jesus accused them of error because they did not know the Scriptures. *"Ye do err not knowing the scriptures nor the power of God."* (Matthew 22:29). Is this not why many err today?

While the scribes and Pharisees would have little to do with the Roman conquerors, the Sadducees collaborated with them, staying in political and religious power, controlling the seat of the high priest. But, strangely, in Jesus these two groups found a common foe. As much as they hated each other, they hated Jesus more.

Why were they so eager to join with their rivals to destroy Jesus? It is because they misread Him, considering Him a political rival and one who might lead a revolt against Rome. Such a revolt, if successful, would remove their privileged positions, luxuries, wealth, power and material prosperity. So they accused Jesus of being against Ceasar, even though Jesus denied His kingdom was of this world (John 8:36). In fact, Jesus taught that one should pay tribute to Ceasar and obey the laws (Matthew 22:21). While admitting He was to be a king, He was a spiritual king, not a competitor to earthly powers.

But the Pharisees accused Him of blasphemy because He said He was the Son of God, and the Sadducees accused Him of treason. A charge that would arouse prejudice in the minds of Roman authorities.

Jesus also taught against the folly of material wealth and power when compared to spiritual treasures (Matthew 6:19-21). You can imagine how this set with those who placed so much emphasis on such things. Jesus taught not to be anxious about food, drink, clothing, etc. , but rather to seek God's kingdom and righteousness before anything else (Matthew 6:33). This ran against their fondest earthly ambitions.

Priests and Elders

The third group of opponents consisted of the priests and elders of the people. Their opposition came more slowly, being centered around Jerusalem and the temple while much of the work of Jesus was done in the countryside. But in His last days on earth, when He was in the city of Jerusalem, teaching, healing, rebuking, the priests became dominant on the scene in the plotting for His death. Matthew 26:3,4, *"Then assembled together the chief priests and the scribes, and the elders of the people, into the palace of the high priest, who was called Caiphas, and consulted that they might take Jesus by subtlety and kill him."* Matthew 27:1, *"When the morning was come, all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death."* They were the ones who conspired with Judas (Mark 14:10). They were behind His arrest in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:47). They hired false witnesses against Him (Matthew 26:59). They urged the mob to call for the release of Barabbas and the crucifixion of Jesus (Matthew 27:20).

Why did they do this? The priests had become a very privileged body of people. They lived royally off the people of comparative poverty. They took advantage of their power over the people because they were supposedly between man and God under the Jewish law. They had position, prestige, respect, honor, rank, title and control. They were determined to retain it.

Like the other opponents, especially the scribes and Pharisees, they stressed ritual to the neglect of righteousness. Therefore, they came in for their share of rebukes from our Lord and they resented it.

He Was a Threat

The greatest menace to them was the teaching of Jesus that He would fulfill the old law and accomplish its purposes. This would mean the removal of the law and its replacement with another. It meant there would be a change in the priesthood. In the faith of Christ every person who comes to God through Christ is a priest and needs no man through whom to approach the Father.

Jesus was also a great teacher and had great influence among the people. They were jealous of this displacement of them by a lowly Galilean. They were supposed to be the instructors of men.

The removal of the old law would also mean the termination of animal sacrifices; one of the primary duties of priests. As far as the priests were concerned, opposition to Jesus was a life or death struggle for what they considered themselves to be. Either Jesus had to go or their way would have to go. Their vested interests were at stake.

So all the loveliness, beauty of character and truth of His life counted for nothing among them. The scribes and Pharisees considered Him a threat to their human religions; the Sadducees considered Him a threat to their station in life and their materialism; and the priests and elders considered Him a threat to their lifestyle and continued dominion over the people. Without doubt, Jesus did cut across the blind folly of political and social ambition, and showed the essentiality of His spiritual kingdom soon to come. He did fulfill and remove the old law, accomplishing its purposes and removing the Levitical priesthood forever. This being so, they conspired together, even though enemies one of another, to crush a common foe, declaring Him worthy of death and pursuing that goal to its end.

Defeat or Victory?

The cross may at first seem a victory for those who opposed Him. But actually it was but another magnificent step forward in God's provision for the salvation of all mankind who will receive Him. His enemies ignorantly, although intentionally, called for the sacrifice by which His blood was shed; the very blood by which we can be justified.

Many still oppose Jesus and for much the same basic reasons. How the world is plagued with human religions and traditions, people of price, wealth, power, sporting their opinions and doctrines above the doctrine of Christ! Self-righteousness and external piety still characterize many. But Jesus Christ, having been raised

from the tomb, and now by the right hand of God as King of all, demands obedience to the will of the Father above everything else, in humble submission, denying self, loving truth and purity in both heart and life, seeking His kingdom first.

The enemies of Christ made their choice about Him. We must also decide concerning Him. We are either for Him or against Him (Matthew 12:30). On our decision hangs the success of life and our place of eternal destiny.

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Entry Into Jerusalem

This study must be preceded by the lengthy reading of Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:28-44 and John 12:12-16. Obviously the reading is too long to be included in our text, but you have them in your Bible. We urge you read them first.

All four biographers of Jesus record what is called His triumphal entry into the city of Jerusalem. It was a triumph for Jesus and His disciples. It is better understood as a loving appeal to the people of that city to accept Him for who He is, the Son of God, the coming King. It reveals the extent to which Jesus went to bless mankind.

Jesus and His disciples had been touring Palestine. Luke 9:51, *"And it came to pass when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem."* Mark 10:31, *"And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them; and they were amazed, and as they followed they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto him."* Jesus had traveled this way many times under different circumstances. This was to be His last journey. The road to Jerusalem was not an easy one for the Lord to take. No man looks forward to the agony of death on the cross. He had told His disciples, Mark 10:33,34, *"Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered up to the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles, and they shall mock him, and*

shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him; and the third day he shall rise again." It was a lonesome walk even though His disciples were with Him. It was in many ways a road that He had to travel alone for none could make the journey for Him. He compelled Himself to go to Jerusalem.

What Was Before Him?

What awaited Him there? There would soon be the encounter regarding the fig tree, the second cleansing of the temple, the last observance of the Passover, His discussion with His disciples, His prayer in the garden, Judas' betrayal, His humiliation before mock trials and hostile tribunals. Eventually, the death on the cross was to follow. But after this, in three days, His resurrection. He was going toward the culmination of His work on earth; marching straight into the hands of His enemies. There was already a price on His head. The eyes of authorities marked His every move and condemned Him as a criminal. He was arrested at the first convenient moment. The people, knowing these things, even wondered if He would come to the Passover at all (John 11:56,57).

Jesus could not have chosen a time when Jerusalem had more crowds and intense religious feelings than this time. Jews in Palestine, even the world over, thronged to keep the Passover. Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century, suggests possibly three million people were in the city. The Passover was one of the most sacred and best observed Jewish celebrations. Jesus could not have chosen a time with greater opportunity to accentuate His message, but neither would there be a time when there would be more opposition.

The crowded conditions, the religious intensity, only emphasize the deliberate manner of His entry. It was a planned action rather than something done on impulse. He had told His disciples what He intended to do. He had them assist Him by securing an ass upon which He could ride. Zechariah had prophesied the event nearly five hundred years earlier (Zechariah 9:9).

His Courage

The deliberate way of His entry reveals it as an act of supreme courage, which is a mark of Christ, and should be the mark of all who profess to follow Him. Sometimes courage may be born of impulse, born under the pressure of a sudden emergency, when there is no time to think the matter through or weigh the consequences. Action is sometimes almost an instinctive impulse. Such courage is admirable.

But there is a higher courage and that is the courage of one who has considered his actions and sees clearly the dangers and personal consequences. It is the courage of having counted the cost and finding it awesome but he deliberately pursues the right course of duty nonetheless. This is the type of courage manifested by Jesus here. This courage makes us love Him and respect Him all the more. He knew His duty and the dangers, yet, deliberately went to Jerusalem. What strong love motivated His journey!

Why?

Why did He do it? Sometimes we learn why things are done because it is explicitly stated. Other times we learn by the way some action is used. His reasons are not explicitly stated, but notice how He used this event.

Jesus used a method of action at Jerusalem which was often used by Old Testament prophets. It was a dramatic, symbolic action that presented the message. Men might fail to listen, but they were less likely to fail to see. Ahijah foretold to Jeroboam that ten tribes would revolt against Rehoboam by taking a garment and renting it into twelve pieces, giving ten to Jeroboam. This was impressive of the message he delivered.

Jeremiah walked about Jerusalem years earlier with a yoke on his neck forewarning Judah of the slavery that was to come if they did not repent. This dramatic and symbolic action was commonplace in the preaching by Ezekiel. Jerusalem's entry was a presentation of the Lord's message by a meaningful and unmistakable attention getting deed. His purpose was to teach the message that it

might enter the heart through both the eye and ear, even though the ear had so often been dull of hearing and the eye blinded by prejudice.

His Message

What was the message He conveyed? It was the same message He had been preaching over three years. He claimed to be the promised King, the successor to David's throne, the coming King of God's everlasting kingdom. Such a role had been announced at His birth (Luke 1:31-33). He had acknowledged this before Pilate (John 18:33-37). The entry into Jerusalem symbolized and emphasized this message.

In the eastern and oriental world the ass was a noble beast, the beast upon which kings rode when they came in peace. It was the horse that was ridden by warriors. When David proclaimed Solomon to be the king after him he had Solomon placed upon an ass and taken through the streets as he was acclaimed king. Jesus was appealing to Jerusalem to make Him a throne in their hearts and acknowledge Him as God's Son, the promised King to come, the King of a spiritual kingdom, universal and everlasting. Here was one more dramatic appeal in a long line of loving appeals Jesus had made that He might be accepted and give salvation to others. He said in essence, "Will you, O Jerusalem, accept me for the One I said I am?"

Reactions Toward Him

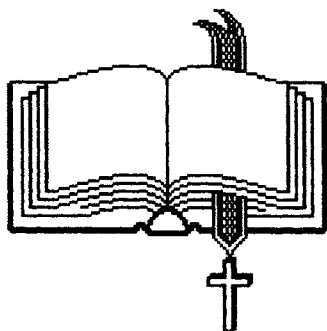
Luke says the disciples cried, "*Hosanna, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.*" The Pharisees insisted Jesus stop His disciples from saying this. But Jesus answered, Luke 19:40, "*I tell you, that if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.*" What was shouted was truth. Whether others accepted that truth or not, it did not alter the truth in any way.

For the most part, the people rejected Him, causing Him to later say, Matthew 23:37, "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her*

wings, and ye would not!" What a pity for those people! What an opportunity they had! But their rejection was their loss and neither did it prevent the kingdom from coming. It did exclude them, if they remained of that frame of mind, from entering therein.

His assertion of divine royalty, His action of supreme courage, His offer of love and salvation is remarkable. Was it all for naught? For those who reject Him it amounts to their condemnation. They doom themselves to an eternal hell. But for those who receive Him as He is, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, the Son of God and Savior of the world, it was a great manifestation of His love. It provides additional evidence upon which we base our faith in Him. Its very revelation is a demonstration of Deity's concern for the spiritual welfare of mankind. We stand in awe and marvel at the gracious, loving and noble action of Christ that He took on behalf of us all.

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A New Typesetting System

As is true with all material things, some of my equipment finally went out and stayed out. This is what happened to the typesetting machine that I have been using for years. Of course, it was old and much used when I acquired it, so I cannot complain about the use I got from it for many issues. But it is a difficult thing to replace such equipment because of the expense.



JAMES W. BOYD

I have decided to go with a computer arrangement and a desk writer. Thanks to one of the good preacher brethren in our area, Tony Lawrence of the Bybee Branch congregation who is quite informed and capable with this type of equipment, I hope to be able to have enough information to operate it before too long.

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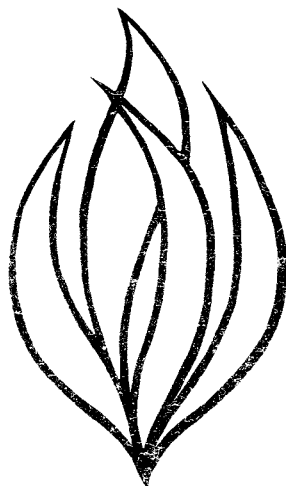
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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Testing Discipleship

Number One

Acts 11:26, "*And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*" We wear the name Christian in honor of Christ. First Peter 4:16, "*Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf.*" But before that God-given name was assigned to the people of God they were called disciples, not as a name but to show a relationship. The name Christian was not given until both Jews and Gentiles were being added to the church. Even after the name was given they were known as the disciples of Jesus.

Who is a disciple? A disciple is one who believes in the doctrine, discipline, teaching of his teacher. He is a follower, a learner, an imitator, one who serves as servant to his master. All kinds of men have disciples, both good and evil. False teachers have their disciples. But a disciple of Jesus Christ is one who learns of and lives in the way of Jesus Christ.

True Discipleship

What are the marks of true discipleship? Let us consider the words of Jesus, Matthew 10:24, "*The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.*" Therefore, from the position of authority Jesus has announced the standards and tests of true discipleship. One may pride himself or herself by professing to be His disciple. But whether we are acceptable to Him or not depends on how we measure according to what He has declared as tests of discipleship.

Luke 14:26,27,33, "*If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot*

be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple... So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."

There are three major points we must recognize. Here is a test that is absolute, definite and inflexible. Unless a person "*hates*" certain ones, takes up his cross, and forsakes all else, he cannot be the Lord's disciple. Three times these verses include the phrase, "*cannot be my disciple.*" Whatever is involved is essential to discipleship.

Hatred and Loyalty

This is not the suggestion of hatred in the sense of animosity and hostility included here. Hatred of people is contrary to all that Jesus did and taught. It is a test of loyalty that is under consideration. The meaning is that one must love all else less than he loves the Lord. No relationship, however near or dear, can mean more than loyalty to Christ and His will. There must be a complete surrender to Him. This demands total commitment to Christ in the Biblical sense. Where this kind of loyalty exists in the heart there will be no shirking of duty, no partaking of the sinful ways of the world, a divorce from materialism, even no stain of deliberate absenteeism from periods of assembly for worship. Rather there will be prayer, Bible study, good works, purity of life, liberality, wholesome attitudes manifested in righteous living. So often the faith of Christ has been blighted before the world by those who profess to be His disciples but hold back and serve Him with reservations, making exceptions to His will where they see fit.

Cross-bearing

We must understand the distinction between cross-bearing and enduring the burdens and hardships of life that are common to mankind. Sometimes when people have suffered tragedies and losses of one sort or another they are heard to say that this is their cross to bear. This attitude of resignation and determination to face hardships is commendable, but this is not the kind of cross-bearing the Lord means here. This cross-bearing can be avoided if

one so chooses. One must willfully and deliberately decide to take up this cross. He will not be forced or compelled, like Simon of Cyrene, to bear His cross. This must be done voluntarily.

This cross-bearing involves self-denial, self-sacrifice, surrender of will, admission of sins, forsaking sin, even restitution where possible. Cross-bearing demands making the cross of Christ the gateway to a new and different life, accepting the standards and authority of Christ as the guide of life for daily living. It is a choice and acceptance of all the consequences that may follow because one decides for Christ.

Cross-bearing is illustrated by the event in the life of Christ where He was asked by the rich young ruler how to have eternal life (Luke 18:18-24), where it became evident that the ruler was not willing to bear the cross. It is illustrated in Matthew 8:19-22 where Jesus insisted proper priorities be established and followed in life. There comes a time of decision when we stand at a crossroads and can either go the way of God or the way of gold. We must choose Christ. We pursue sacrifice, service and surrender or we seek men, money and materials. We must decide who shall be first in our lives. It must either be the strait gate or the wide gate; the narrow way or the broad way; life or destruction.

To make the wrong choice, or to refuse to voluntarily choose the Lord's way above everything else is to disqualify ourselves from being His disciple. Luke 9:23, *"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."*

Obedience

A second test of discipleship is that of continued obedience. John 8:31,32, *"As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed."* Discipleship implies beginning your walk with Christ but there also must be faithfulness in that walk. It begins with faith, repentance, confession of Christ and baptism into Christ. We have several accounts of such conversion in Acts chapters two, eight, nine, sixteen, eighteen and

twenty-two. Discipleship begins with submission to the will of Christ, but His will must continue to be respected and obeyed. This explains why every epistle written to Christians includes admonition to faithfulness, steadfastness, alertness against falling away. The situation where one does fall is described in unsavory terms in Second Peter 2:20-22.

John 6:59-69 records where people who had begun to walk with Jesus listening and learning. Yet, having begun, later hearing teaching that offended them, they turned and walked with Him no more. They ceased to be His disciples.

Sometimes people hesitate becoming a Christian for fear they “can’t hold out.” There is no justified excuse for not becoming a Christian. Fear of what might be in the future is not an acceptable excuse for refusing to come to the Son of God. We would be deceptive to suggest there is no need to count the cost and enter into Christ with determination to remain loyal. But there is nothing to justify coming to Him to give Him a “trial run,” anymore than refusing to come because you fear you may not be faithful. A race never begun is never won.

After one surrenders to Christ he learns more and more of His will for life. If he will continue to obey in **being** a Christian as he was in **becoming** a Christian he will not rebel against Him nor leave Him. Being willing to start is essential, but not to be confused with the necessity of being willing to continue. We are His disciples **if** we continue in His Word.

Love Demands Obedience

John 15:9,10, *“As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.”* As children of God Christians are blessed because God loves His children. We are taught to continue in that love. Never will God cease to love us, but shall we ever cease to love God? Some have done this. Shall we? We are taught to follow the example of Jesus in this matter as in all else. Jesus did abide in the Father’s love by keeping the Father’s commandments. We

shall abide in the Father's love and the love of His Son as we continue to keep His commandments.

First John 2:3,4, "*And hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.*" This second test of discipleship involves making a decision as much as does the first test. Just as we must willingly decide to put Him first, forsake all else, bear the cross of discipleship, we must decide in spite of being confronted, confounded and confused with temptations of Satan to grow with Him or go from Him. True discipleship means continuing in obedience, doing what is needful to grow spiritually. The only alternative to spiritual growth is spiritual decay.

Let each one examine himself or herself for true discipleship: (1) Will we deny self, put everything and everyone else after Him, take up our crosses and bear whatever consequences may come because of our deliberate decision to follow Him? (2) Will we continue in His Word in faithfulness to the end? Two other tests shall be discussed in the next lesson.

* * * * *

**We may try and fail, but we are sure to fail when
we do not try.**

* * * * *

Testing Discipleship

Number Two

Acts 11:26, "*And the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.*" In the first lesson discipleship was defined as one who believes and follows in the doctrine of his master, a follower and learner, an imitator and servant. A disciple of Jesus Christ is one who has learned of Christ and lives in the way of Christ. The marks of true

discipleship are the subjects of these two lessons. Jesus gave at least four tests whereby we can know true discipleship that He approves. We have already mentioned how one must place loyalty to Christ above everything and everyone else. He must also bear his cross with a deliberate and willful choice to walk with Christ. We also mentioned the necessity of not only becoming a Christian but being what we have become. There must be continued obedience to His Word.

John 13:34,35, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

Please note that discipleship is conditional. If certain conditions exist then we are His disciples. If this condition does not prevail, how can we rightfully claim true discipleship just the same? Therefore, here is another way we can sever our relationship with Christ if we choose, or another way we can prove the genuineness of our discipleship if we choose.

Love Each Other

No people on earth have greater reason for brotherly love than Christians. We have the same spiritual Father; belong to the same spiritual family, have been bought by the same blood of the Son of God, have the same hope, and are blessed with the same spiritual blessings of forgiveness and fellowship with Deity. We fight the same battles for truth, have the same enemies, and seek the same heaven. Furthermore, no people on earth could have a greater need for brotherly love than Christians. Being of the same body, when one suffers, all suffer (First Corinthians 12:26). When one has cause to rejoice, we all have cause to rejoice. When the devil ensnares even one, a painful affliction is heaped upon us all. When the devil is resisted by even one, all are strengthened as a result. With the foes of the faith of Christ leaving no stone unturned to inflict harm against all who profess Christ, even as they militantly, aggressively, massively, savagely and deceptively attack to destroy, we need brotherly love among us. Love is the result of unity and unity is the result of love for each other and love for the truth of Christ.

Brotherly love craves to bless, help, restore, heal and enrich each other. Love for God, brethren and truth furnished the basis for our communion and fellowship with each other without which such things cannot exist nor survive.

The lack and void of brotherly love spells a defective discipleship. Where there is envy, strife, backbiting, undermining, jealousy and division there is obviously the lack of brotherly love. Where there is rebellion against the revealed truth of God, the sowing of discord with false doctrines, the undercurrents of dissension, there is evidence of the lack of brotherly love. When we speak of brotherly love, as some are very prolific in doing, we must ask if our actions are the actions of brothers in a common cause that accompany our pious words. It has been our unfortunate experience that some who cry the loudest for what they say is "brotherly love" have been the most cutting, vicious, subverting and even lying people we have met on earth. They show little to no respect even for the truth of God when presented to them.

Fellowship Broken

Jesus made allowances for circumstances where fellowship of brethren is disrupted by persistent and willful offenders. He has taught us how to deal with such people. Consider such passages as Romans 16:17; Second Thessalonians 3:6; First Corinthians 5 and the matter of fornication; Galatians 1:6-9; and in personal confrontations, Matthew 18:15-17. At the same time we first seek restoration of the ruptured ties between brethren (Galatians 6:1; James 5:19,20). Even when the most severe actions have to be executed, brotherly love is neither forgotten nor cast aside. Those who offend are sought, being talked to rather than just talked about. Second and third efforts at recovery are made. But there comes a time when faithful brethren, in order to retrieve the soul that is in sin, must show a brother's love for both the erring soul and the faithful brethren as well as the truth of God enough to withhold fellowship until repentance is evident. Even then, brotherly love is not dismissed even though fellowship is dissolved. We do not show love as God would have us show love to leave the impression that sin and

error are condoned and sinners can continue in sin with the acceptance of other brethren.

Brotherly love is sowing seeds of peace by conformity to truth. This truth is to find lodging in honest and good hearts. Brotherly love will cause one to reject being a part of rumbling and grumbling over matters of opinion. Brotherly love builds by working for harmony and cooperation among brethren with the standard of truth being the platform and foundation upon which the brotherly ties are built and maintained.

Just as the star on the chest of the sheriff shows him to be sheriff, and his uniform announces to all he is what he claims to be, so brotherly love is the Christian's badge and uniform that he is a true disciple of Christ.

Fruit Bearing

The fourth test we mention is the fruit bearing test. John 15:8, *"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."* The very life of the Christian is to bring glory to God. Matthew 5:16, *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* How can mere man bring glory to the glorious Deity? This is done as he partakes of the ways of Deity and displays his allegiance by the kind of life that he lives.

The faith or religion of Christ is the most usable and practical faith humans can follow. When God made man he was mindful of man both inwardly and outwardly. The faith of Christ is relevant and applicable to man both inwardly and outwardly. The Lord taught purity of heart, pronouncing blessings on those of a pure heart. He urged that one's treasure is where his heart is. We are taught to set our affections on things above. Matthew 15:18 also teaches, *"But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man."* Cultivating and possessing the right kind of heart is most important in being a disciple of Christ.

The matter of fruit bearing deals with the outward man, the visible manifestations of a righteous inner man. While men have no right nor power to properly judge the

heart of another (God does), we are to be, as one said, "fruit testers." Observing fruit that is borne is not to be confused with sinfully judging another. The Lord said not to judge having reference to judgment that is prohibited, obviously. But the Lord also commissioned judging righteous judgment (John 7:24). So we can know He does not condemn all judging. He also taught, "*By their fruits ye shall know them.*" (Matthew 12:33; Luke 6:43,43; 7:20). In the parable of the sower that which produced good fruit was good ground. If it did not produce fruit you could know it was not good ground. Jesus also denounced the fig tree for its failure to produce at all. Disciples who do not bear good fruit are not good disciples. John the Baptist told the Pharisees and Sadducees, "*Bring forth therefore fruit meet for repentance.*" Matthew 3:8.

Good Fruit

What is the fruit of true discipleship? It is a changed life from the life of sin (Romans 6:2). It means one walks as Christ walked (First John 2:6). The thief steals no more. The immoral lives morally. The hater loves and the worldly abandon the ways of the world. The drunkard ceases his drinking. The adulterer comes out of adulterous relationships. No more does one work the works of the flesh but bears the fruit of the spirit of Galatians 5:22,23.

Also involved in fruit bearing is the reaching for and winning lost souls to salvation. The faith of Christ is more than just a creed and code of ethics although such is included. It is a crusade for righteousness and the salvation of the lost and precious souls. To have been redeemed obligates the disciples to address himself or herself to the supreme work of winning others to the Redeemer. That discipleship requires the ceaseless efforts to convert others. It demands service to others, being solicitous for the spiritual welfare of others, fervent and forceful in producing fruit of more souls and reaping the harvest for the Lord. The empty-handed and unproductive Christian is like that branch that is cut away because it bears no fruit (John 15:2).

How then can we determine the validity and genuineness of our discipleship? This is done by measuring ourselves by the standards of discipleship that Christ, the Master, has

assigned. We must forsake all others, place Him first in our lives, bear our cross for His sake, continue in obedience to His Word, love one another fervently, and bear the good fruit to God's glory. *"Then shall all men know that ye are my disciples."*

* * * * *

Christian Liberty

Christians need to know the truth. They also need to be aware of charges made against the truth. One of the charges often heard is that preachers, teachers and members of the church are not allowed enough freedom. The church has become too restrictive, some say. Consistently, those who forsake the church speak of their "new-found freedom" in their new religious affiliations. They say they enjoy a free fellowship and free church.

The love of freedom runs deep in the hearts of people over the world and particularly in our nation. But what is our liberty in Christ? How is it defined? Like everything else about the faith of Christ we must learn this from Scripture.

Freedom and Liberty

Hear the words of Christ on the subject of freedom. *"Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."* (John 8:32). Obviously, there is no freedom of the kind of which Christ speaks without truth. Jesus defined truth. *"Thy word is truth."* (John 17:17). Whatever freedom in Christ involves and allows must be determined by the Word of God.

John 8:36, *"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."* Freedom is ours because of Christ. There is no freedom apart from Christ. First Corinthians 7:22, *"For he that is called in the Lord being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant."* A Christian is called by the gospel and is identified as the Lord's freeman.

Galatians 4:26,31, *“But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all... So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.”* These passages speak of the church and its freedom. Galatians 5:1, *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”* This freedom in Christ is worth holding. It is evident that there is a Christian freedom.

Romans 8:21 tells of the *“glorious liberty of the children of God.”* Second Corinthians 3:17 says, *“Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.”* James 1:25 speaks of the *“perfect law of liberty.”* The freedom under consideration cannot be separated from Christ, the church, faithfulness, the Spirit and the law of Christ.

The greatness of liberty in Christ is made even greater when we realize that Christians were not always free but once in bondage. Romans 8:21 mentions the *“bondage of corruption.”* Romans 6:17 says that *“ye were the servants of sin.”* John 8:34 teaches, *“Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.”* Romans 3:23 shows how this applies to all because, *“all have sinned.”* Therefore, all responsible and accountable people were once in the bondage of sin. But Christians are now free from that bondage. Let us proceed.

Free From What?

This raises the question, *“From what are Christians free?”* Romans 6:16,17; 7:6; 8:2,3 all teach we are free from the law of sin and death. First Thessalonians 1:10 teaches we are free from wrath. Second Peter 1:20 teaches we are free from hopelessness and estrangement from God (verse 19). Romans 8:1 teaches we are free from condemnation. Galatians 2:3-5 informs us we are free from the laws that men would bind which God has not bound.

When we realize that such things which held us in bondage are the things from which we are delivered, we rejoice in the freedom in Christ. But what some have failed to grasp is that freedom in Christ has its limitations and responsibilities. We are not free from everything. We hear “scholars” speak of academic freedom as if they have the right to teach anything whatever they choose without responsibility to anybody. Freedom is so often interpreted

to men, "do my own thing, say whatever I will, regardless of the consequences to self or others." Some think they have the right to believe, teach and practice whatever pleases them and satisfies their consciences and God will accept it and everybody else should also. But such abuse of the idea of freedom has promoted all kinds of immoralities, disobedience and rebellion against authority, divine and human. Some think freedom of speech means you can say anything you wish anytime you wish and anywhere you wish. "We are free from all law," some religious leaders have dared to proclaim.

Romans 6:1,2, *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"* Some, impressed with greatness of God's grace and the need of this grace have concluded that they have permission to sin because this would expand the grace of God as it covers sin. But freedom from sin did not include freedom to sin.

First Corinthians 8: 8,9, *"But meat commendeth us not to God, for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak."* We are not bound by human opinions in matters of indifference. But neither are we to think we are free from the way we influence others. Christians are never free to think what they do is nobody's business. There may even be things that, of themselves, are permissible, neither right nor wrong, that we cannot and do not do if they cause another to lose his or her soul.

Not "Do Your Own Thing"

Christian freedom is not doing whatever you wish, saying whatever you like, teaching and practicing whatever you think and want. It is limited. We are always in servitude, either to Satan or to God. We are never totally free in every respect. When we leave the servitude of Satan we enter the service to God. Such is the theme of Matthew 11:28-30 and Romans 6:16-18.

Those who often abuse freedom, misunderstand it, criticize what they call the "power structure" of the church, are liberal in their philosophies and doctrines. This kind of

language is the same used by elements of our society who seek to overthrow the order of authority in every realm. Much of the political, social, civil and religious unrest pours from the liberalism so many have adopted and their abuses of freedom.

Seat of Power and Authority

The church is charged by some of being too authoritarian as if there is no authority at all. Authoritarianism is said to violate one's freedom. That there can be abuses of authority, none would deny. But shall we conclude that abuses of authority renders all authority null and void? Shall we conclude that abuses of freedom means there is no freedom in anything? Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary defines authoritarianism as advocating the principle of obedience to authority as opposed to individual liberty. Inasmuch as there is a limit to the freedom of the individual by the authority of Christ, there is in a true sense authoritarianism to be exercised in the church. All that we do is to be done in his name, which means by His authority (Colossians 3:17). All authority belongs to Christ (Matthew 28:19). There will be punishment to those who obey not (Second Thessalonians 1:7,8). Paul told Titus, "*These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority.*" (Titus 2:15). Even though the charge of authoritarianism is meant to deride the church, if a church is the Lord's church there must be recognition of authority. Herein has the Protestant world protested against God in the overthrow of His authority. Herein is the sinister and destructive power of liberalism.

There is a "power structure" in the church, although not always the sinister kind some charge. Jesus is King. We are subjected to His Word. Elderships do have authority to oversee the church. Some resent all authority and prefer what they call freedom. But such freedom is not true freedom. It is rebellion. To preserve true freedom there must be respect for authority, and authority must be respectable. When either is absent, trouble prevails.

Is Freedom Suppressed?

I have been preaching many years and yet not heard faithful brethren suppressing thought, inquiry and

investigation. At the same time I have heard faithful brethren insist that matters be settled according to divine authority. Those who want to "do their thing" inject false doctrines, bind opinions, introduce denominational imitations and innovations, set aside the necessity of authority for what is said and done, and then charge the brethren with suppression if challenged.

One former preacher praised a certain church because he was now allowed to speak on any subject anyway he wanted and nobody would challenge him. (We wonder if the freedom to challenge what somebody does not accept has been suppressed.) To prevent and refuse to the liberals the right to sow their seeds of division, discord, heresy and apostasy provokes them to wail, "Denial of freedom." The real trouble is they are in rebellion against *"thus saith the Lord."* What is condemned is license to sin and that is called deprivation of freedom. You can rest assured that if you challenge a liberal's contentions you will be subjected to vicious abuse and nobody will attempt to restrict your freedom faster than a challenged liberal.

If the time comes in any church when that church ceases to discipline its membership and require submission to the Word of God, that church becomes no more worthy to be called "of Christ." When people rebel against the teaching of the Bible and relegate only to themselves the right of freedom, misusing the genuine and true freedom in Christ as taught in Scripture, they no longer are servants of God but have turned like the dog to his own vomit again and the washed sow to the mire. When the mouths of gainsayers are stopped, how they cry, "No freedom." Such people are adequately described in Second Peter 2:17-19.

When we realize how bad sin is and know freedom from sin in Christ, and that we are delivered from the old law, and understand that we are free to walk in the way of Christ, we will have grasped what freedom in Christ really is. Christ will return and deliver His kingdom to the Father as Moses delivered Israel into Canaan. Then we shall know our eternal spiritual freedom that is ours through Jesus Christ.

* * * * *

Love's Memorial

By the fifth day of the last week in the life of Jesus before His death time was running short. There was still much to be done and little time in which to do it. It was the Passover season, the most celebrated of all the Jewish holydays. Jerusalem was extremely crowded with Jews from all over the world who had come for the Passover. Jesus spent most of His days in the city and would retire in the evenings to a little community nearby named Bethany.

Mark 14:12-17, "And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover, his disciples said unto him, Where wilt thou that we go and prepare that thou mayest eat the passover? And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, where is the guestchamber where I shall eat the passover with my disciples? And he will show you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us. And his disciples went forth and came into the city, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover. And in the evening he cometh with the twelve."

From this record we learn that Jesus, a Jew, faithfully kept the Passover, living as He did under the Mosaic Law. The events that were soon to occur were planned and intended. The entire procedure had been determined from the start.

The disciples could locate the proper place from a man carrying water. This was an unusual sight in Jerusalem because women were usually the ones that did that task. When evening fell we find Jesus with His chosen twelve alone and together in the upper room, away from the throng, ready to attend to this sacred observance, and to engage in other spiritual events that are more meaningful than His disciples could realize at the moment.

What Was The Situation?

The atmosphere of the gathering was not as one might at first have expected. You might think all would be calm and quiet and the situation characterized by peace and relaxation among close and intimate friends. But not so! It was tension shrouded with mystery and the air of impending disaster, as if they expected the unexpected. This was because Christ had already foretold the events that would follow (Matthew 20:18,19). They were now in the very city where such things were to occur. The somber mood of Jesus on their journey added to the mystery of the environment. For Jesus, it was a trying hour, especially since He not only knew what faced Him but because He also knew the attitude and actions that His disciples would take. These things added to His distress.

What was the situation regarding the twelve? There was strife among them over who would be the greatest after His departure. Even in the shadow of the cross, the disciples seemed to exhibit more concern for their personal ambitions, having jealousy one toward the other, than a concern for the coming grief and pain of Christ. In order to teach the vanity of such pride and impress the lesson of humility, Jesus washed His disciples feet, teaching service rather than the desire of personal greatness.

Later He would be betrayed by one of His chosen company, even one who had come to the Passover Supper with Him. Peter, also, in spite of boasts to the contrary and doubtless boasts that were uttered with good intentions, would deny that he even knew Christ, not once, but thrice. The situation in the upper room was unique because of the distressing heaviness on the Lord and the failure of the disciples to grasp the seriousness of these events.

The Bread and Cup

Into this array of circumstances we read of a deliberate and far-reaching action taken by Jesus. Matthew 26:26-30, *"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it. For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the*

remission of sin. But I say unto you, I will not drink it henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Paul wrote of this event in First Corinthians 11:23-26, "*For I have received of the Lord that which I also have delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat, this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come."*

Love's Memorial

These verses record the institution of the Lord's Supper. It was a simply action, taking bread, blessing it or giving thanks for it (Luke 22:16-20), giving it to the apostles, and following a similar routine with the fruit of the vine. The ingredients were unleavened bread (which was the kind of bread used at the Passover Supper), and fruit of the vine (there being no evidence that it was fermented wine.) These ingredients did not become and never were the literal body and blood of Jesus. Even after His prayer of thanks their substance changed not. It was still called bread and the fruit of the vine. But this was a symbolic action by Jesus and these ingredients represented His body and blood. It was to be partaken in memory of Him.

To further affirm that it was a memorial that He was establishing twice Paul said that Jesus said, "*This do in remembrance of me.*" The Lord's Supper commemorates Christ and what He had come to do on the behalf of mankind in delivering mankind from sin.

While the Lord's Supper was instituted at the observance of the last Passover Supper, the two are not to be confused, even though there are certain similarities. The Passover was to serve in remembrance of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Exodus 12). That feast would keep alive in the memory of the Israelites what God did for them. It stood as a silent witness of liberation through the blood of the Passover lamb that had been sprinkled about their doors.

Proclaims Christ

Jesus set Himself forth as the sacrifice for sin. First, Corinthians 5:7 says Christ is our passover. John 1:19, John preached, "*Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.*" Christ is the means of salvation, liberation and redemption. Without Him there would be no freedom from the wages of sin. His death brought reconciliation between man and God (Ephesians 2:16), and this simple but meaningful memorial acknowledge Him and what He did.

First Corinthians 11:26 says it is to "*show*" or proclaim the Lord's death. Here is an announcement and official proclamation. What is hereby proclaimed? Primarily it proclaims Christ and all things pertaining to Him, with emphasis on His death. That it was to be observed until He comes again implies His resurrection and ultimate return. The Lord's Supper sends forth the publication of these things from His birth in Bethlehem to His return some day.

When a Christian partakes of the Lord's Supper he does so in memory of Christ and all about Him. He proclaims his faith in Christ as Savior, as God's sin-offering, as reigning King and coming Lord.

A Reminder

Finally, the Lord's Supper is a reminder of the reality of sin and of God's love for man to save him from sin (John 3:16). The Lord's Supper recalls to the mind our enslavement to the destructive power of sin. It is the sinfulness of mankind that made the cross necessary. The very sacrifice the Lord's Supper commemorates was for us. Behind the suffering of His sacrifice was the hopelessness of sinful humanity, doomed to an eternal hell. God recognized this and provided for man through Christ. Romans 5:6-9, "*For when we were yet without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we*

shall be saved from wrath through him.' The Lord's Supper is truly a memorial to the love of God.

* * * * *

Blending of Wills

Toward the end of the Colossian letter Paul included several personal greetings to his fellow servants. Among them was chapter four, verse twelve. *"Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."*

One of the ways to describe and explain the existence of the evil, the wrong and the conflicts in this world is that there is a clash of wills. Neighbors are against neighbors; husbands against wives, children against parents, and in all such instances it is simply one will against another. This same type of clash extends beyond personal, conflicts to international clashes between nations. In the final analysis, the evil, the trouble and sin in this world reduces to a clash between the will of people against the will of God. Since Eden this battle between man's will and God's will has been raging. It is a war of wills; the created against the Creator.

God's Will and Our Will

We need to understand two very significant matters concerning the will of God as it relates to man. It is God's will that we have a will of our own. God created man for His own purposes and the primary purpose for the existence of man is to glorify God and do the Father's will. But God created man a free moral being, having the power of choice and volition, with the ability to make his own decisions, having the power to choose what to believe and what to reject, to whom or what to be loyal and what to oppose. This extends even to man's capacity to decide whether he will serve God or rebel against God. God has created man with this power and He will not subvert it.

We are not mere robots playing out some programmed existence without anything to say about it. We are not machines wound up to run a certain course over which we have no power. We are rather intelligent and morally responsible spirits. While God desires fellowship with us and has provided the means for this fellowship to be attained and maintained in spite of man's sins, God does not force this fellowship upon man against man's will. Not only does God offer man this fellowship, but man must willingly and deliberately choose and seek this fellowship.

We must also recognize that it is the will of God that people live peaceably with each other and at peace with Him. The Lord opposed the havoc and strife so evident in the world. The enmity, conflict, war and tensions one against the other is not what God has designed for man. This comes because of man's choices. It is a battle of the will of one against the other and the will of mankind against the will of Almighty God who created man a free agent.

Way of Peace

The way to peace between people is for people to first have peace with God. As one grows closer and closer to God, and another grows closer and closer to God, it is inescapable that they will grow closer and closer to each other. It is in Christ that the prophecies of old are fulfilled where men beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. In Christ the middle wall of partition is broken down and enmity is abolished between people and peace established.

Therefore, in order for the ravages of sin to cease, in order for peace to reign and conflict, strife and evil to be checked and overcome, there must be an end to the battle of wills. Instead of a battle of wills there must be a blending of wills. There must be the mixture of the will of man with the will of God so the lines of demarcation between them cannot be distinguished. While man must continue to have his own powers of choice and exercise his own will, he can do this only within the limits and according to the precepts of the divine and revealed will of God.

Is it possible to blend man's will with the will of God? Evidently God thinks so because His revelation is to that

end. Is it easy to accomplish? Nobody has ever suggested it is easily done. Can we expect perfection in this blending? No, not to the extent that man will reach sinless perfection. But there can be a blend in the sense of completeness, maturity and approval of God by forgiveness of man's sins. The will of God for mankind is within man's reach.

How Is It Done?

How can this blending be accomplished? When we speak of mixing the two wills we do not want to imply man gives a little and God gives a little and through negotiation and compromise the two will can come together. Nothing could be further from the truth. The will of God is perfect. It is man that must change and conform his will into the likeness of the will of God. God's will is perfect in every respect. Man's will is imperfect. The creature is not above the Creator just as the servant is not above his lord. The perfect does not bend to accommodate the imperfect, but man must come to God. This means the imperfections of man must be erased and this is accomplished by the system of salvation from sin that God has designed and delivered through Christ.

There are two very important factors that must exist in blending man's will to God's will. There is also one peril we must recognize and against which we must guard.

Know God's Will

To blend my will to God's will I must first understand His will. Colossians 1:9, *"For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."* Ephesians 5:17, *"Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is."* The fact that we are expected to understand God's will is evidence sufficient to know that it is possible to understand it. But to have understanding we first must have knowledge.

That mankind might know His will, God sent Jesus Christ to this world that through Him His will might be revealed. God speaks to man through His Son (Hebrews

1:1,2) the message men must know (John 1:17) because it is that will by which we are sanctified (Hebrews 10:10). Jesus revealed that will through teaching and living. Acts 1:1, *"...all that Jesus began both to do and teach."* John 4:34, *"Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work."* He sought not His own will but that of the Father (John 5:30). What He made known was that which He had heard of the Father (John 15:15).

The only source from which we gain knowledge of the will of the Father is the Word of God. God revealed that will through the apostles as they were guided by the Spirit (Ephesians 3:3-5). That revelation is now recorded in the inspired, inerrant, infallible authoritative and all-sufficient Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16,16). Can anyone doubt, in the light of these points, the value of Biblical knowledge and the necessity of Biblical study? Without study there is no knowledge, no understanding, no blending of will, no peace with others or God, but only the onslaught of sin, conflict, strife and evil. Ignorance explains much of the sin in the world. Hosea 4:6, *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."*

Do God's Will

We must not only know and understand His will but we must do that will. Matthew 7:21, *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."* Jesus illustrated the wisdom of doing with His teaching about two builders, the wise and the foolish, the one building on the foundation of rock and the other on sand. The one who builds on rock is like the one who hears and does God's saying. James 1:22, *"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only."* It is possible to know and understand God's will and never do it. Undertaking God's will demands a commitment in every realm of life. Whatever we do must be by His authority (Colossians 3:17). It requires non-conformity to the world, but transformation of the mind (Romans 12:1,2). It insists that we do the will of God from the heart (Ephesians 6:5,6). This includes abstaining from evil (First Thessalonians 5:22). Reception of the promises of God is conditioned upon man doing God's will Hebrews 10:36, *"For ye have need of patience,*

that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."

Everything in life is to be governed by the question, "What would the Lord have me to do?" Our emotions, the manner of earning a livelihood, our speech, recreation, homes, marriages, care for the body, mind and spirit, every situation and circumstance must be guided by the will of the Lord. Without understanding and undertaking God's will we cannot blend our will to His and the loss is ours to suffer.

There is a grave peril against which we must guard and avoid at all costs. We dare not attempt to undercut God's will in favor of our own. When we do what God wants only because it satisfies our own will we are really serving self, not God. The world too often tries to make God fit man as man is, even in sin. Many act as if the Lord ought get up-to-date. To them God should see how things are and bend His will to suit us and accommodate our trespasses. This is so often the approach being used by man. It is the opposite of the attitude of Christ when He prayed, *"Not my will but thine be done."*

Whose Will Is First?

We may believe many things and do many things, but find ourselves pulling and tugging at God, trying to push Him into our mold. Many try to make Him conform to their standards while searching for loopholes in their favor to get around doing what He has commanded. Some brethren have even come up with the false doctrine of "essential and important commands versus non-essential and unimportant commands." Who is any man to declare anything God has said to be non-essential and unimportant and push it aside to accommodate mankind in sin? Such an effort is not only false, but futile and will destroy those who teach it and adopt it.

The only approach to the will of God is like that expressed by young Samuel in Second Samuel 3:9, *"Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."* We must be like ancient and early Israel who declared, *"All that the Lord hath spoken we will do."* Job said in Job 13¹⁵, *"Though he slay me, yet will I*

serve him.” In the words of First John 2:17, “He that doeth the will of God abideth forever.”

Have thine own way, Lord, have thine own way,

Thou art the potter, I am the clay;

Mold me and make me after thy will,

While I am waiting, yielded and still.

* * * * *

Give Me Your Attention, Please!

Surely, no reasonable person who claims to be a child of God would want to advance the cause of digression and apostasy among churches of Christ.

Yet, this is being done by many. Not only are there spokesmen who are advocating false doctrines more in the imitation of denomination than after the revealed doctrine of Christ. But not only those who names are prominent are undercutting the cause of Christ.

Those who “go along” with error and refuse to stand against it are doing their part to destroy the church.

Too many times we hear and see people who talk as if they really want to see truth prevail among us. They will even bemoan the advances of liberalism and other forms of digression.

But on the other hand they will support false teachers, use their literature, attend their big events, advertise the activities that feature the prominent promoters of digression, and then piously act that everyone ought consider them sound and solid.

Such inconsistency is unacceptable to any honest mind. Brethren ought take note of such double-takers and unstable sort and realize that such “go alongism” is eating the heart out of the faithful efforts of the church.

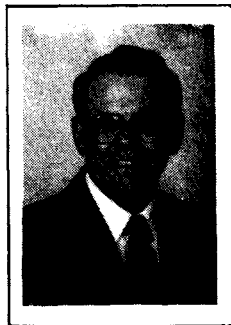
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Learning a New System

Those who have had experience with learning how to use computers will appreciate what I have been trying to do in recent days. The ads in newspapers and on television about the simplicity of operations is a bit oversold in my opinion. I see more and more the wisdom of the cartoon I have seen in a number of offices, "To err is human, but if you really want to foul it up, use a computer." But everyone keeps encouraging me that time and practice will prevail. I sure hope they are correct.



JAMES W. BOYD

I have good instruction and feel confident that if others can do it then I can eventually do it a little bit. I already have proven that I can produce the type for a booklet and this issue is tangible evidence. Surely, progress awaits.

* * * * *

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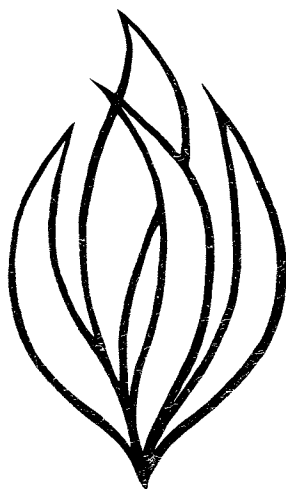
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*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*



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Jesus Brings Good News About God

The distinguishing characteristic about the teaching of Christ is that He brought good news that is called the gospel. His is a message of salvation for mankind who was otherwise hopeless and helpless, doomed and damned. But He also brought us teaching that revealed good news about God. He told us and showed us things about God that had not been known or properly understood previously. His revelation was often in stark contrast to the misconceptions the Jews and pagans had regarding Deity.

The Jews had a long history of contact with the true and living God. Yet, their knowledge of Him was inadequate, incomplete and often they had a distorted concept of Him. One dominant consideration of God that they held that was very correct is that God is holy. Repeatedly in the Old Testament we read of God as the Holy One. *"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts."* (Isaiah 6:3).

What is Holiness?

For someone or something to be holy means that there is a distinctiveness about it. To be holy is like being sanctified, set apart, separate from others. There is a uniqueness that places that thing or being in a special position. Such is the nature of God. In relation to mankind God is on a different scale, in a different sphere, separate from mankind because of His righteousness and absolute perfection in every quality.

The concept of the holiness of God influences the way the Jews thought of God. They considered Him almost unapproachable because of the vast difference between themselves and God. It was considered to even be dangerous to approach God. God had once said to Moses, *"You cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."* (Exodus 33:20).

When Israel was encamped at Sinai they trembled in the presence of God. No man nor beast was to even approach the mountain when the presence of God was there lest they die. In their worship and in offering sacrifices only the high priest could enter the Most Holy Place to offer the blood of atonement. Others were not permitted into the presence of the Lord the same way. It was deemed a fearful matter to come before God.

The power, as well as the righteousness of God, was emphatically impressed on the Jewish mind. Exclusive service and worship belonged to Him. There was to be no other God. God was so majestic, powerful and awesome that it was thought impossible to comprehend Him. It is true that it is impossible for man to fully understand Deity, but the Jews seemed to think it reproachful for man to even make the attempt to understand Deity. Therefore, there was little effort to be close to God or even understand what could be understood about Him.

His holiness was so absolute that it terrified the sinner. The fierce wrath of God against evil was repeatedly manifested before them. God's power to destroy sin was evident. This struck terror in their hearts at times.

All of this amounted to a reverence and respect for God that was profound among the Jews. The scribes, when copying the law, took special precautions and observations regarding the writing of His name. This reverence was not unwarranted, but should continue to exist among all people to a greater extent than we observe it today. But there was a side of God that the Jews failed to grasp.

Pagan Gods

As for the pagan and heathen world that worshipped gods of their own creation and invention, they had a different attitude toward their deities. Generally speaking, they considered their gods to actually be enemies and totally hostile toward man, completely detached from the affairs of man and indifferent to the welfare of man. Man was more a victim of the gods and they were to be feared and pacified lest the gods turn loose their anger against them at the slightest provocation. When all was going well they

considered the gods to be pleased. But when hardship came upon them they felt the gods were displeased and something had to be done to pacify them, even though they were not quite sure what should be done.

Their gods were thought to have no concern for man, but all the gods were interested only in their own pleasure. They never walked among men but lived in a trouble-free serenity, unless something provoked them. The gods were considered heartless, without pity, uncaring, not even aware of man's existence, or if aware, they took pleasure in making man's lot in life difficult and painful. Some people today still have this twisted and wrested view of the true and living God is heaven.

It was into this realm of thinking that Jesus came with revelation about God, good news about God, that mankind had not heretofore known and understood. He contradicted the heathen concepts of deity. While He did not contradict the Jewish view of God regarding the reverence and respect that is due God, and He taught that man should respect the holiness, majesty and power of God, He shed additional light about God that gives us a greater insight into the nature of our Creator and Judge.

God Can Be Known

Jesus taught that God can be known by man. God has revealed Himself to man. Christ came to reveal God to man. John 14:8,9, *"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?"* It is not that Jesus and the Father are the same Divine Being, but that Jesus revealed the nature of the Father. Therefore, mankind could not just know about God, but could know Him with a personal relationship as a companion, friend, comforter, guide, as well as Lord and King. God is not a God who hides Himself from man in total mystery, but to the extent mankind is capable of grasping the nature of Deity, God reveals Himself, even sending His Son to earth to show Himself through His Son, and allow mankind to know His nature. God can be known, closely and warmly.

Rather than God being detached from man and unconcerned about him, God is very much involved in human affairs. Acts 17:27, "*He is not far from every one of us.*" His concern for man is seen in His promise of providence, the way He has worked out the means of salvation for man, as One who cares for us, who hears and answers our prayers, showing us through His Word the right and best way to conduct life. He even sends rain on the just and unjust. He has not just wound up the earth like a clock and turned it loose, but is aware what takes place, overrules in His own manner, and watches over us day and night. How different from the pagan view of God!

God is Unselfish

Unlike either Jewish thinking or pagan thinking, Jesus shows us that God is One who does what He does, not for His own benefit alone as men perceive it, not simply to seek His own glory and pleasure, but He is a most unselfish God. God gives. He gave life. He gave His Son. He gives salvation. He gives every good and perfect gift. Every revelation, command, restriction and instruction is for man's benefit and good. The God Jesus taught is the God of genuine love, seeking the good of others. True love is selfless. While all of this abounds to God's glory, and He is worthy of it, His work was on behalf of His creatures and is characterized by the giving of Himself for man's glorification.

He Forgives

In sharp contrast to the gods who desired to punish and make life difficult for man, God is a forgiving God. True, God is just and will punish the evildoer. But He offers to forgive man when man will meet His conditions. He called men to repentance, not willing that any should perish (Second Peter 3:9). There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents (Luke 15:7).

God sent Jesus into the world, not to condemn the world, but to save the world (John 3:17). Even as God hates sin, He loves the sinner. The reason He hates sin is because sin destroys those He loves. Sin prevents the salvation of God's creatures. Because of His love for mankind He has provided the way of salvation. If anyone is destroyed it

will be because they have not come the way of salvation God has provided and not because God finds pleasure in inflicting man.

God Can Be Approached

Possibly more startling to both Jew and pagan was the teaching of Jesus that God not only is approachable, but God desires man to approach Him. God has initiated the way of approach, inviting man to come to Him and even seeking man to be reconciled to Him. Some of the greatest words spoken by the Christ were the words of invitation to come to Him in Matthew 11:28-30. Again, in Revelation 22:17, it is evident that Deity and those who belong to Deity invite all to come. James 4:8, *"Draw nigh to God and He will draw nigh to you."* Men formerly thought God should not be approached, and to do so was to invite death. But Jesus taught that coming to God did not mean death, but life. As the parables revealed how the woman sought the lost coin, and the shepherd sought the lost sheep, so God seeks the lost person that He might save him and be united with Him. Such a concept of God had not previously been understood by either Jew or pagan.

The Love of God

Jesus also revealed a newness about the width and breadth, the narrowness and precision of God's love. God loves all mankind and His love is this broad. He loves each individual. His love is this precise. God is not a tribal or national God, but the God of the universe. He is the God of all. He not only loves every tribe, nation, and all the world, but every individual personally that is in the world. God's concern is for the individual. This stems from the dignity of each person who is created in God's spiritual image. One has commented, "God loves each of us as if there was only one person to love." There is no way for anyone to be "lost in the crowd" when it comes to the concern God has for him or her.

He is Father

Finally, Jesus presented God in a way never presented before His teaching, at least as completely. God had been looked upon as Father, but there is more than one meaning

to being a father. In one sense, God is the Father of us all because He created the first parents from whom we all have come. But the fatherhood of God carries the concept of love, fellowship, a day-to-day relationship, as one who nourishes the child in body, mind and spirit, equipping him daily for life. Jesus showed God as our Father like this.

He is not the spiritual Father of all, but only those who belong to Christ. Hence, the necessity of being "*in Christ*." He cannot be the Father of the obedient and disobedient in the same way. The Christian is the one who can call God, "Father," and is a son or daughter of God (Romans 8:14; Second Corinthians 6:17,18).

Jesus was very discreet in calling God, "*Father*." He used the term with utmost reverence, considering the term sacred and with immeasurable respect. But He also used the term, "*Abba, Father*." (Mark 14:36). "*Abba*" means Father, but in a more intimate, warm and close sense, as a child might address his loving parent that could not be used by other children. Translators have found no completely adequate synonym to convey the full nearness and loving closeness associated with the word, "*Abba*." Paul used the term twice (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6) to embrace the warmth as well as the reverent in the concept the Christian has of God. Nobody used this term regarding God before Jesus used it.

Seeing the harsh, cold, aloof and dreadful way that deity was comprehended before Jesus came, cannot we see how His revelation of God is good news? God is not "out there, somewhere," unapproachable, heartless, uncaring, unknowable. While He remains holy, powerful, majestic, unselfish, forgiving, demanding and just, He is actually seeking the fellowship with man, concerned for man, for each person, as a loving Father, desiring for man to be near Him that He might bestow His riches upon him as His child. God reveals Himself through Christ who is our only approach to Him (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). Come to God and allow Him to be what He desires to be for and with you by obeying the gospel of Christ!

* * * * *

Voices of Concern

Our title is also the title of a book published several years ago that attacked churches of Christ. These attacks were written by men who once were members of the church, but for reason best known to themselves and God, they were caught up in the upheaval of rebellion against the church and turned to rend that which they once believed, being engulfed by liberalistic and modernist thought.

There is no reason for the Lord's church to be totally immune from criticism since the church is composed of people. People are not perfect and there is always room for growth, improvement and correction. But to denounce the divine side of the church because of the frailties of members is quite another matter. The bulk of criticism in the book is aimed at the faith of Christ.

Who?

Who are these accusers? They are former members, preachers, teachers, missionaries, and some who were reared in Christian homes and attend "our" schools, but who pursued their theological degrees in the seminaries (cemeteries) of liberal schools. They are generally people who have been very impressed with what they call intellectualism and the arbitrarily determined academic accomplishments. Often they are people who have swung like pendulums from one extreme to another, all the way from anti-Coca-Cola to pro-liquor, from the doctrine that the church cannot help anybody except its members to the philosophy that the church is to provide everything from recreation, entertainment and all the desires of life.

What?

What are they saying? They frequently misrepresent over and over with cynicism, assuming what they need to prove. They justly criticize inconsistencies of members, the difference between words and deeds, Sunday-morning

Christianity, hand-me-down religion, and inexcusable hypocrisy. **But what faithful gospel preacher has not done this?** Let the half-hearted and hypocritical church member know that he provides fuel for the fires of the church's enemies by his worldly life. The lukewarm and insincere church member is the best weapon Satan has in his arsenal against the truth.

Their line is predominantly liberal theology, patterned after the denominational line. They speak of the church as a segment of Christianity rather than the true church. Doctrinal differences should make no difference, according to them, but open membership to all who "believe." Unity-in-diversity, which is agreeing to disagree, is their theme. They wail they are not "free" in churches of Christ to do what they want because the church is "unconcerned" about social problems. They even teach the insufficiency of the Word and all religious truth, to them, is not in the Bible. They rebel against what they call "the power structure." They accuse the church of spiritual immaturity because we fear to have "our pet doctrines" investigated. The church is only a band of "Bible worshippers," according to their criticism, and proponents of what they call legalism. They are against conformity to any law, placing great emphasis on psychology, philosophy and what they call "scholarship."

Why?

Why do they make such charges? What are their motives? Let God judge their motives. We shall judge their fruits. They may be concerned but they are obviously not concerned about following the teaching of the Bible, not concerned about the church revealed in the New Testament, and not concerned for brethren in spite of pious claims to the contrary. They are concerned about restructuring the church to make it acceptable to the denominational world, wishing to promote liberalism, and are willing to tear the church apart from its Biblical paths.

Let us add here that liberals in every field are working toward the same general goal whether it be political, economic, religious or whatever. They want to promote change for the sake of change and uproot standards that are upheld by God-fearing and Bible-believing people.

While they say they deplore efforts to deny the Lord, they lend their support to the same people and movements that work to that intended and announced end. They have adopted a position that contends if you can't bear them, join them. To overcome social ills they have abandoned the only solutions there are. They offer no alternatives but only tear down.

Whatever be their concern, their vicious attacks concern me because some will believe them. Young people will be led astray by them, especially those who attend classes in "our" schools. The Biblically ignorant are prime targets for their errors. It shows how weakly the doctrine of Christ has been preached over the past years by many and have cultivated the church to be vulnerable to such influence.

The book, VOICES OF CONCERN, was published a few years ago and it hit the brotherhood with an impact that shocked some. Some never believed anybody could ever be as vicious as they were in their attacks and naively thought nobody would listen. But this teaching that has been done in our schools in the training of preachers has been done so thoroughly that many pulpits and pews were ripened to receive their heresy, and the fires of apostasy now roar almost out of control. This diabolical digression has been sweeping over the church with torrential power. The Ketcherside Movement, the new doctrines of Rubel Shelly, the classroom teaching in the schools, the literature from the publishing houses, the mouthings of "clergymen" from the churches (especially those near the schools, in metropolitan areas, and with large numbers and finances) have jumped on the bandwagon of "church bashing." So many elderships are weak, timid, misinformed, gullible, ignorant of truth that they no longer (if they ever did) insist on sound doctrine. Many of the membership demand preaching that soothes rather than saves, and the digression that those who chose to shut their eyes and thought could never happened has so swept the church, schools and papers that in many localities where there once was a church of Christ there is no nothing more than a Church of Christ denomination. Churches, schools, papers and people once respected for upholding truth will now not even allow truth to be preached. Preachers once desired because of their firm and strong stand for Biblical truth are slandered, ridiculed and victimized by the

“loving and irenic” apostates. Programs once introduced to proclaim truth have become puny, compromising and ecumenical and are now destructive weapons against the church and truth.

Churches of Christ?

So many churches no longer deserve the identification as a church of Christ. They have departed from the faith and followed the modern Baals of our time. Just plain honesty has been displaced by a pragmatic (whatever works and gets crowds) philosophy and message.

In the Schools

Doubtless there have been some good men who have taught truth in the schools. But many have failed to teach truth and even those who say they stand for the truth will not, have not, and are not likely to expose the error now accepted, tolerated and promoted by nearly every school among us of which I have knowledge, and I have made a point to find out. The schools have been, are, and will likely continue to be the more sinister source of digression among churches of Christ. While this is “heresy” to some to criticize their beloved schools, these same people have little criticism for those of the schools who propagate heresy against the truth of God. Possibly for the sake of what they call “academic freedom and standing, desiring to hold on to jobs, they have chosen the path of “wisdom” to go along as if everything was harmonious with the Biblical truth. Unsuspecting parents have shed bitter tears over the corruption of the faith of their young at the very schools where they sent their children because they thought the schools would assist the home in grounding them further in the faith. But in fact the schools have undermined their confidence in the truth and uprooted Biblically-based convictions in favor of the liberals trends and digression.

The schools are not the only source from which these insidious apostasies have come, but it is a denial of truth to contend that they have not been and still are a major factor and dominant source of it. The use and tolerance of false teachers on the faculties have been the undoing of the credibility of the schools regarding Biblical teaching. They may well produce excellent secular and academic

work, but as far as teaching the Bible and training preachers, they have become servants of the devil. I advise any parent who sends his or her child to one of the so-called "Christian schools" operated by "our brethren" to warn their children not to believe what they are taught because it is as likely to be heresy as truth. The unsuspecting young can and will be led astray. What the young preachers coming through the schools are doing and preaching today is evidence enough to convince any honest mind what I am saying is true. How many times have we wrestled with school-trained preachers even about fundamental points. They were either not taught the truth or were taught error on many matters. They have told me where they learned what they now believe and they got it while attending "our schools." They come out of these places with a greater loyalty to change, some man, their school, than the truth. They have been infected with error and they go to pulpits overseen by men who are called elders who have lost interest in truth and are more concerned with peace, numbers, fame and finances. They stand before filled pews of Biblically untaught and worldly-minded members and pour out their nothings to the satisfaction of their flock.

We Are Concerned

Those who love truth have good reason to be concerned about such things as the unity-in-diversity movements, the denominational imitations, the subtle undercutting against the inspiration of the Bible, false doctrine on marriage, divorce and remarriage, evolution, dancing, drinking, immorality, grace only and no law doctrines, various cultish "isms" and the list goes on and on.

The day is already overdue for people who are truly serious about staying with the truth to rise up and contend for the faith against these children of darkness who pose as angels of light. **It is past time for those who say they love truth to continue throwing sops of support and encouragement to the very ones tearing the church apart with their heresy.** If we fail the oncoming generation and the Lord to stand for the truth we shall contribute to their condemnation, and our own.

* * * * *

How Bad Is Sin?

First John 3:4, "*Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.*" This refers to transgression of God's law, either by word, deed, thought or neglect. Preachers have longed for the ability to adequately convey the enormity of the power of sin. They have searched for words, figures of speech and illustrations that could impress minds and present sin as it really is. So often the pleasures of sin blind people from seeing how bad sin is. The frequency of sin has seared consciences and made people less sensitive to it.

The only gauge we have with which to measure the enormity and hideousness of sin is the punishment that God has decreed against it. Bear in mind, God is infinite in mercy, love and compassion. So when we find punishment that God enacts against sin, the better also we are to understand just how evil sin really is.

Hardship Aplenty

Some have questioned whether there is any punishment for sin in this world or the world to come. One thing is certain. Even the world is weighted with the vast burden of woe, pain, misery and death. How do you explain it? Life is strewn with tears. The earth is dotted with graves. Hearts are anguished and grief and distress abounds. Do you know why? The Bible teaches this is due to sin. Romans 5:12, "*For if by one man's offense death reigned by one...*" There is no other explanation for the ills that characterize this world except they are the results of sin that was introduced into the world by the sin of Adam and Eve. While nobody is guilty of the sins of their ancestors, there are many consequences of the sins of others that all must suffer and endure because they are in this world. While there is hardship and woe due to other's sins and our own sins, we are most concerned if there be punishment for sin in the future world. What does the

Bible teach about this? None have passed over to return to tell us his experiences. Our information cannot be experimental, but can only be ours by what God has revealed. What has God revealed about punishment in the next world? We pursue our investigation by asking several relevant and important questions.

Punishment After Death

Is there such a thing as any punishment after death? Luke 12:4,5, *"And I say unto you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that they have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him."* There are those who can inflict harm in this life, but not beyond this life. But there is something God can do to a person after death that is called casting into hell. That is worse than physical death and comes after physical death. There are other passages that teach the same thing but this answers our question and we move on. Yes, there is such a thing as punishment after physical death.

When does this suffering begin? Luke 16:19-31 shows there is not only punishment after physical death as we have already determined, but the punishment we now consider begins as soon as we die. The rich man was in torment, in hell (hades, which is the unseen and intermediate state of the dead between physical death and the resurrection). This was not his place of eternal punishment, gehenna, hell. But again we have our answer. Punishment begins at the point of physical death.

Is there to be a final judgment for each one? Hebrews 9:27 assures that after death there is a judgment to come. Acts 17:31 assures us that God will judge us through Christ. Second Corinthians 5:10 makes this point as clear as language can teach it. Matthew 12:41,42 shows the resurrection and the judgment. John 5:26-29 teaches that all shall be raised and judged. Only by denying the Scriptures can one conclude there will be no judgment. When Christ comes the judgment will take place (Matthew 25:31-33). All shall be before Him. Revelation 20:11,12 makes this certain.

Will there be any punishment of sin after the judgment? We know there is punishment prior to the judgment for some. Notice again the scene of Matthew 25 and specifically read verses thirty-four and forty-one. *"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world... Then shall he say unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."* The reality of the devil's hell is assured.

Points on Punishment

What will that punishment be like? How can we describe it? How long will it last? It will be eternal and without end. There will be no hope of its termination or ever leaving it. There will be no relief. How long will heaven last? The same word is used to tell how long punishment will last as how long heaven will last (Everlasting or eternal, Matthew 25:46). Even though this is beyond our comprehension, is not the extent of hell defined for us sufficiently to know that we want to avoid it all all costs?

While there are no words that can adequately describe the joys of heaven, so it is with the inadequacy of words to describe the horrors of hell. Many have conjured up the most awful scenes they can imagine in their attempts to describe it. But such is speculative and of little use. We will be content to let Scripture speak.

There will be pain, weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 25:30). There will be no rest (Revelation 10:20). It will be a place of unquenchable fire (Mark 9:48). It is torment (Revelation 14:11) where *"the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever."* It is a place of darkness (Matthew 25:30), indicating it is removed from the Father of light. It is a place where there is consciousness and awareness of one's fate and where he can remember his misspent life and recall the wasted opportunities to be saved (Luke 16:19-31), which was even true of the torment before the judgment.

If you are horrified at the thought of such a place, you should be. Hell is real and the Bible affirms its reality as much as anything else in Scripture. We cannot grasp the

full impact of such a place where there is nothing of God, but only the devil. But God has warned us of it to enable us to avoid it.

Possibly we can understand better how bad sin is with this information. If sin is so bad that a God of love, compassion, mercy and grace is compelled by His holiness to punish the sinner, can there be any doubt what our attitude toward sin must be? Cannot we see why we must "*abstain from all appearance of evil*," learning to "*abhor that which is evil*?" (First Thessalonians 5:22 and Romans 12:9).

Hell Can Be Avoided

But why should we live and die in sin and be punished? Why should anyone be content to face judgment unforgiven? Why consent to such an eternal existence in hell? Why not escape that? God has provided the way of salvation. Why should we not diligently pursue that way? There is peace with God and freedom from sin. There is the path of reward that we can follow. The saving blood of Christ has been shed and we are invited to be washed clean by it.

I am sure that faithful gospel preachers earnestly desire the power to convince mankind and let all see what sin is and just how powerful and destructive it is. If we would see it then there would not be any sinners who would by-pass the opportunity to lay hold on salvation. Rather they would hasten to obey. All we can say is to show you God's gauge that when one dies in sin he goes to torment and eventually into hell. But being in Christ means that all will be well with our souls.

* * * * *

Does it ever occur to many of us that the Lord is serious about our need to worship Him faithfully? We should not trifle with the need to be present every Lord's Day in assembling with the saints!

People Not At Home

The Bible tells about people away from home and that God recognizes many are not at home. He even knows why it happens that they are not at home as well as their condition and state while away from home. We read of what God has done for people away from home and how He has made provision for people to return home again.

Home means different things for different people. With most home is a sweet and precious word that brings forth thoughts that we love to ponder. If the home is as it ought to be it is a desirable place and relationship of peace and happiness, joy and security, where one is accepted and pretense is neither wanted nor expected.

Home is more than a house, an address where there is furniture. Home is where there is love, caring and mutual interest, a company of loved ones and familiar surroundings. Many beautiful poems, songs and stories have been written about home. When one is away from a good home he misses it. Most people love home wherever it is and what it is. "Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home." One might move away, but he enjoys returning to what he calls home. He enjoys visiting but is always glad to get back home. Why is it that home means so much to so many?

God Gave the Home

God designed the home, gave it to mankind. Like the church, the home is of divine origin and is the oldest of God's divine institutions. The home exists for the benefit of mankind and God planned that through the home many of man's needs, blessings, training and guidance would come. The first home was the Garden of Eden, the home of

Adam and Eve. When we trace the home, we ultimately go back there and to God who gave it.

Adam and Eve found themselves away from home because of sin. They had disobeyed the voice of the Lord and gave no heed to the warning God gave them. They were separated from the tree of life and driven from the garden, their Paradise home, and not allowed to return. This is what sin does to people. It deprives them of great blessings that God had rather bestow upon them. But sin drives them from happiness, security and the providence of God.

Abraham Left Home

In Genesis we read about Abraham being away from home. We find him wandering in Canaan and Egypt. No land was there he could call his own. He even had to buy ground from strangers for a place to bury his dead. He lived in the heathen land of Ur of Chaldees but now was away from there, but for a very different reason than was Adam and Eve away from home. He left Ur because God told him to leave and go to another land. He obediently left. Sometimes people find their love for home will cause them to disobey God. Here we see a man away from home because of his love for God, assuming duties God has given him. This is often true of preachers who must make changes of residence and separate themselves from loved ones and places they have known in order to do the work of spreading the gospel. When Paul was on his missionary tours he was away from home.

Those who leave home to do the Father's will make sacrifices. They leave friends, family and familiar circumstances. It is difficult if not impossible for those who stay home to understand the impact of such things on life. But there are rewards also that tend to offset many sacrifices. God has always blessed those who are away from home because of their love for Him and call of duty.

Joseph Sent From Home

We find Joseph away from home because his brothers sold him as a slave into Egypt. Later he served in Potiphar's house, but was sent to prison. Later still he had risen to great heights of authority. Sometimes people are away from

home due to circumstances beyond their control. They are not there by first choice. Many have experienced this kind of thing even as they served their country.

Even so, Joseph allowed the Lord to use him while he was away. The Lord made provision for the preservation of Jacob's people, the nation through which would come the Messiah. Transfer of jobs, getting education, sickness, many things necessitate people leaving home. They can still allow God to use them profitable for good. Faithful Christians have always taken the gospel with them when they left home. Many churches have been established over the world by brethren taken from home because of wars. The early church was scattered by persecution but preached the gospel wherever they went.

Israel Not At Home

After Israel divided we find Judah in Babylonian captivity for seventy years because they had rebelled against God, disobeyed His will, turned to idols, lived wickedly and ignored His promises and warnings. If they had served Him they were promised prosperity and warned of the loss of home should they fall. Because of a hardness of heart and stubbornness of will they were taken away. People cannot expect the blessings of God and home when they throw themselves against the very truth and power that provides those blessings. Some complain that God has not blessed them more than He has. Probably they are blessed already more than is deserved. But they never serve God, yet, expect Him to pour out blessings upon them anyway.

The Prodigal

In Luke fifteen we see a young man feeding swine and eating the food that the swine did eat. This lad was in the last place you might expect to find him. He was away from home in a foreign land, in need and want because he had spent all his living in wicked living and wasted his talents. He was now in poverty, friendless, a long way from home. His home was a place where he was loved and people cared for him, where he could work, and be happy.

He had not been driven from home but was away because he wanted to indulge himself and live life his own way.

He thought himself wise enough to cope with the world and cast off the ways of his father's house. He went into the world of temptation with selfishness, sensuality, shortsightedness and lacking wisdom sufficient for good judgment and soon lost all he had in sin and rioting.

But this particular story has a happy ending because he went back home and was received by a loving and forgiving father. The message of this story is the way God longs for His people who have strayed to return to Him again. The wayward Christian is lost and away from the Father, but he can return if only he would. The Lord above longs for just such a return.

Jesus Left Heaven

For about thirty-three and one half years our Lord was away from His heavenly home. Having existed with the Father and Spirit, He took on the form of man for a third of a century, being born in Bethlehem, reared in Nazareth, traveling to Jerusalem, Jordan, Galilee, found in the temple, by the seaside, on the roadway, in homes, teaching, preaching, healing and eventually being nailed to the cross and placed in the tomb, always away from home.

This world was not His home, nor is it the ultimate home of His disciples. After His resurrection He returned home and there will remain until He comes to take His disciples home with Him forever. This world is but a place of sojourn for pilgrims and life is "*a time of sojourning.*" (First Peter 1:17). While we are here we are really away from home (Second Corinthians 5:6). We are now but strangers and pilgrims on our way home (First Peter 2:11).

The Bible tells of many people not at home. It is a divine record of God's way for mankind to live this life of sojourning as he makes his way home. Knowing that this world is not home for the Christian, God leads and guides by His Word the path to follow. "We must needs go home by the way of the cross; There's no other way but this." Jesus Christ, God's Son, is the only way (John 14:6).

A missionary couple returned from their field of labor after many years and was disappointed that nobody met them at the dock. Many others had come on the same boat

and were met. Some were dignitaries, prominent people, and others just plain folk. But as the preacher studied the situation and was hurt his wife cheered him by saying, "We are not home yet."

There will be a joyous welcome for the redeemed when all of God's singers get home. *"Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."* (Galatians 6:9).

* * * * *

Building on the Bible

The last part of the twentieth century has experienced world revolution. Despite periods of relative peace, the world has been on the edge of a volcano that has often erupted. There seems to be no immunity from destruction. Governments are overthrown, cultures shattered, sacred traditions cast aside, the world is full of noise, confusion and chaos. Possibly the world has always been this way, but our age has surely seen its share. What people thought was nailed down has been pulled up. With mass murders, bazaar behavior, gang violence, lawlessness, our era has been explosive. Such is evident in the doubt, fear, skepticism and godlessness of people. One has described our age with the single word, "nervous."

This is strength, seeing people have more knowledge, education and scientific progress that we are told holds the cure for everything. But have such things produced the utopia promised? Obviously, it has not. They cannot.

We Live Now

Into this explosive age we have been called by the gospel to serve Christ. We may wish we lived some other period when things may have seemed more secure. But we live in the present, this century. What can we do? To what do we anchor ourselves to prevent being tossed about with every wind? Do we allow ourselves to simply drift along by

uncharted and uncontrolled currents of degradation? Shall we bow to misdirections of revolution, even against God?

Our answer is a firm, "NO!" There is a reliable guide and a foundation upon which can take our stand and not be moved so we can live confidently with the assurances that such a way is right and eternally lasting. Jesus said, Luke 6:47-49, *"Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will show you to whom he is like. He is like a man which built a house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock; and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without foundation built a house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great."*

Build on the Rock

We build the house of our lives on solid rock when we hear and do the will of God. In the Bible we have the firm foundation we need because we have the truth of God, truth about ourselves, life and eternity. One dominant characteristic of Christ was His dogmatic and unwavering endorsement of Scripture as the authoritative Word of God. He often criticized human traditions, vain religions, even aged institutions, cherished beliefs and misinterpretations of Scripture, but never did He belittle, side aside or contradict Scripture. Would we all would be so wise!

There are those who do not hold this view of Scripture as did Christ. Those who follow Him are told our faith is in a dead book rather than a living Lord, and that we have such a zeal for the Bible that we are guilty of "bibliolatry," have a paper pope and such like. Some claim that sooner or later we shall see the Bible is full of errors, cracks, flaws, historically and scientifically, and when we do we shall lose our faith. If the Bible were shown to be such we would have no basis for our faith or source of authority. The Savior and Scripture stand or fall together because all we know of the Savior is revealed in Scripture. The reason some have lost faith in Christ is because they have been convinced the Bible is false. People always leave the Christ of the Bible when they leave the Bible. They adopt some kind of Christ of their own making, but not the true Christ.

But in spite of the reckless, vicious, radical and slanderous efforts of the enemies of Christ, not one jot or tittle of Scripture has fallen.

The Bible is not God

No intelligent Bible believer is guilty of making the Bible an idol. While He treats the Word of God with respect, gratitude and submission, it is not because the Bible is an idol, but because He respects God and accepts the Bible as the Word of God. Victor records once advertised with a dog listening to the phonograph, and the slogan was, "His Master's Voice." So it is with the believer and the Bible. The Bible reveals His Master's voice.

The reason our tottering, trembling and shaking world is on the brink of universal disaster is because people have rejected the Word of God. That Word always has been relevant to the needs of mankind. The tragedy of our day is that the Word has been buried beneath the rubbish of this world. The light has been smothered under the refuse of sin. Even more tragic, the Word has been in many cases buried even among those who say they serve the Lord. This is as amazing and absurd as what happened in Judah as recorded in Second Kings 22 with the finding of the law.

While repairing the temple the book of the law of God was discovered. The Word had fallen into such disrespect and disuse that it was lost. The result was the failure to know and learn. Sacred vessel were used in idol worship. priests were consecrating themselves to the service of Baal. Cult prostitutes plied their trade in the temple itself. Sons and daughters were burned as sacrifice to false gods. Heathen temples were erected. Every desecration imaginable had become a reality, all because the people had lost the Word of God.

As its loss brought degradation, finding it, learning and applying it brought restoration. Idols were torn down, altars to Baal destroyed, vile worship ceased. Josiah, the king, was horrified at the wickedness, neglect and departure from the truth and did all in his power to institute a reform. He engaged in the cast task of teaching the people the Word of God. Second Kings 23:1,2, "*And the king sent, and they gathered unto him all the elders of Judah*

and of Jerusalem, and the king went up into the house of the Lord, and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the people both small and great, and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant which was found in the house of the Lord.” It was needful for all the people great and small, leaders and followers, to know all the Words of the Lord. So it is today!

A Lost Book to Many Today

If God’s chosen people, dwelling in the promised land, could and did lose His Word, right in the temple, surely we know it can be lost in a world of rebellion against God. It has been lost as far as most of the religious world is concerned. While we do not yet read of prostitutes operating out of church buildings, we hear so-called ministers talking about the “new morality” contending for “gay” churches where homosexuality is acceptable. The moral standards of Christ no longer are useful to them. Non-Christian teachers have been invited to use facilities of churches that call themselves Christian. There even be atheists who claim to be Christians. This is like claiming up is down, right is wrong, yes is no. There even be so-called Christian who claim God is not so narrow to insist that all men approach Him through Christ, in spite of John 14:6, Acts 4:12. They deny the inspiration, sufficiency and infallibility of Scripture and anything in Scripture they do not like they ignore. The emphasis on the material and human wisdom to the neglect of revelation from God is dominant among many, which shows how far removed from truth the world has gone.

Such an attitude in the hearts of men is one avenue Satan uses to attack truth. Some rise up in indignation at this and say, “Not so!” Some challenge and reject the contentions of skeptics. But the ignorance of the Word of God is just an effective way to show disrespect for it as Judah’s losing it or skeptics attacking it. Sometimes a direct attack on the Bible provokes a defense of it. Ignorance on the part of those who claim to believe it only surrenders the truth without even giving the devil a fight.

Ignorance

Hosea 4:6, "*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.*" You cannot please God without faith (Hebrews 11:6) and you cannot have faith without the Word (Romans 10:17). You cannot know the message of truth without study (Second Timothy 2:15). If one wishes to usher in anarchy, godlessness and violence upon his head and those of oncoming generations, if he wishes to crown Satan as king, and turn the world over to heathenism, bringing terror, persecution and destruction to believers, and invite the sacrifice of life and the abandonment of eternal bliss for friends, children and self, just remove the only barrier now holding back the flood of chaos. Just refuse to know and live the teaching of God. Just fail to build your life on the Bible. Just let the craze for change and something new, sensational and exciting replace the two thousand year old tried and true gospel of Christ. You do not have to become a monster, murderer, raise riots, indulge in immorality. Just fail to build your house upon the rock. Let the petty, trivial, temporal, worldly things mean more to you than standing for the truth in a sin-stained and sin-ruined world. Allow the world to crowd out worship, Bible study, godly living. By this you will make a significant contribution to the forces of evil.

But a person or a church that knows the Bible will not digress if it truly believes it. But if not taught and know not the Bible, it can be carried anywhere and everywhere by most anybody at anytime. On what are you building your life and staking your eternity? We plead with one and all to build on the Bible, the authoritative, inspired, inerrant, infallible and all-sufficient Word of God.

* * * * *

I truly hope and pray these lessons of this issue have been of some spiritual benefit to you. If so, the efforts made are fully rewarded.

Abraham, an Example

Great Bible characters provide for us living demonstrations of what God would have us to be. We all know how Abraham is repeatedly upheld before us as one who had obedient faith. But there is another trait of this man we might overlook. Was he not also sympathetic toward those facing their destruction because of their sins? When he learned God would destroy Sodom did he not plead on their behalf if some righteous people could be found among them? We know such were not found, but Abraham did not desire to see them destroyed. Nor do we rejoice over the condemnation of any. We long for the salvation of everyone. We must be sympathetic toward those who sin and work toward their forgiveness.



JAMES W. BOYD

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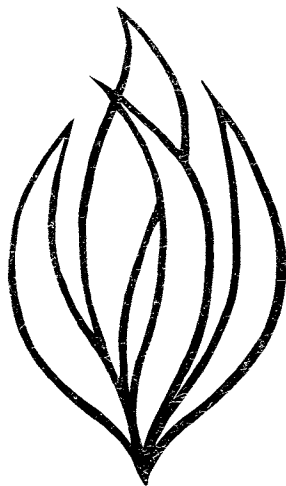
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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).



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The Holy Spirit, A Person

Every Bible subject deserves study. Some subjects require more study than others. Some have more immediate application than others. Some are more basic and some are more difficult, but all deserve study. We need to know what Scripture say about the Holy Spirit.

This has possibly been a neglected subject because it does have difficult parts. But once studied we believe we will see that there is no justification to neglect it anymore. The Holy Spirit is prominently mentioned in Scripture. People know something about God the Father and God the Son, but less about God the Holy Spirit. We need to break the shackles of ignorance, superstition, traditions and doctrines of men and learn what the Bible teaches about the Holy Spirit.

The Bible is the only source we have from which to learn. We can learn from nature that God is. We cannot know anything about the Father specifically, or Christ specifically, without Scripture. Nor shall we ever know anything about the Holy Spirit without Scripture. If the Holy Spirit informs man of truth separate and apart from the Word, we wonder why nobody has ever known anything about the Holy Spirit except where the Word has been taught!

Acts 17:19, *"Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device."* Colossians 2:9, *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."* The term "Godhead" refers to Deity or Godhood. As the word "manhood" is used to express that which makes a man a man, the term "Godhead" or "Godhood" refers to that which makes Deity what Deity

is. In Christ is seen the whole and fulness of Deity. There is but one God, meaning one Godhead or Godhood.

The Godhead

The Godhead is composed of three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is eternal and equal with the Father and Son. He was present at the creation (Genesis 1:1,2). The Word "God" in verse one is Elohim, a plural word, meaning the Godhead, including all three persons. John 1:1-3 shows the presence at creation of the Son and the Father. Therefore, there was a plurality of persons involved in the creation. Genesis 1:26 reads, "*Let us make man in our image.*" Again, plurality is involved.

In the New Testament all three were present at the baptism of the Son (Matthew 3:16,17). All three are mentioned when the Son gave the "great commission" (Matthew 28:19). All three are mentioned in Second Corinthians 13:14. The Godhead is not three aspects of one person, nor three Gods, for there is one God or Godhead. But the Godhead is composed of three divine persons in unity and oneness.

A Person

The Holy Spirit is presented in Scripture as a person. While there is much about the nature of Deity we cannot know for lack of revelation, there is much that is revealed and this we should learn. The Holy Spirit is not a glorified "it," nor just an influence or mystical power. The Holy Spirit is more than the mind, temper and disposition of the Father and Son. The Holy Spirit is presented with personal pronouns in Scripture, such as John 14:26; 15:26, 16:13,14, and other passages.

We know that like produces like. Life produces life. The Holy Spirit lives for He gives life (Galatians 6:8). The Holy Spirit has mind (Romans 8:27). "*He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit.*" The Holy Spirit has the power of choice, the ability to make decisions. Acts 16:6 shows the Spirit decided that Paul was not to preach in Asia or Bythinia but in Macedonia.

The Spirit is life, light, love. He works, speaks, acts, blesses, reconciles, transforms, glorifies, bears witness, restrains and forbids. All of these traits point up the fact that the Holy Spirit is a person just as is the Father and Son. He is not simply a thing, influence or an "it."

Holy Spirit Was Involved

Having noted the presence of the Holy Spirit at creation, we also note how He functioned with the Father and Son in that creation. It is said of the Father, Jeremiah 51:15, *"He hath made the earth by his power; he hath established the world by his wisdom; and hath stretched out the heaven by his understanding."* Psalm 33:6,7, *"By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth... For he spake and it was done; he commanded and it stood fast."* Jehovah spoke the world into existence. The agent through whom this was done is called the Word, the same designation given to Christ in John 1:1 and the One through whom He has spoken (Hebrews 1:2). The Holy Spirit gave life, enacted laws and organized the material universe, moving and brooding over that which was created which suggests organization and the giving of system to the universe. *"By his Spirit the heavens are garnished."* (Job 26:13). The placing, arranging and adorning of the heavens with planetary bodies that were created was by the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit functioned in the spiritual creation as well as the material creation. Genesis 1:26, *"Let us make man in our image."* Man is not in the physical form of God because Deity is a Spirit (John 4:24). Therefore, this refers to man as having and being spirit as God is Spirit. Involved in the creation of man's spirit were all three persons of the Godhead.

Certainly the Holy Spirit functioned in the creation of the spiritual kingdom of God, inasmuch as the apostles who preached the gospel by which the kingdom came into existence spake as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:4). The fact that the Holy Spirit was involved in the creation, both material and spiritual, only confirms the major points we have learned thus far. The Holy Spirit is of the Godhead, equal and eternal with the

Father and Son, possessing the attributes of a person, having functioned in all the work said to have been done by Deity.

In Both Testaments

We find the Holy Spirit prominently mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament the Father is mentioned more prominently and in the New there is more mention of the Son. But the Holy Spirit is mentioned in both. What we know about the Father in the Old Testament came by the Holy Spirit (Second Peter 1:21). What we know of Christ in the New Testament came by the Holy Spirit (First Corinthians 2:12,13). This means that the entire revelation from Deity is a result of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit guided the apostles into all truth (John 14:26; 16:13).

Even though the Holy Spirit is not mentioned as prominently in the Old as the New, twenty-three books refer to Him specifically. Sometimes He is called the Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Jehovah, the Spirit of the Lord, the Holy Spirit. We see Him at creation, involved when dreams were interpreted, giving visions, in the construction of the tabernacle, imparting to certain ones special powers, speaking through the prophets, striving with men in wickedness even before the flood of Noah. Over and over He is mentioned.

In the New Testament we learn of His relationship to the salvation of mankind. Nearly two hundred sixty-four references have been counted mentioning the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. The New Testament can almost be called the book of the Holy Spirit because the New Testament is the revelation of the dispensation of Christ, the system of specifics and principles Deity has given mankind, and it all came through the Holy Spirit. To understand the mission and ministry of Jesus Christ is to understand the mission of the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit continued the work of salvation for mankind after the ascension of Christ.

We close this first portion of an extended study of the Holy Spirit by citing a few instances referring to Him in the

New Testament. The child born of Mary was conceived of the Holy Spirit. Jesus was called the Son of God, but conceived of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:20), which is proof positive that the Holy Spirit lives and is Deity and a part of the Godhead or Godhood as we have noted.

The Spirit lead Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted. He was present at His baptism. By the power of the Spirit demons were cast out. Fifty-seven references in Acts alone shows the Spirit guiding the apostles, granting them power to perform miracles to confirm the message of truth they preached. Yes, the Holy Spirit is a living person of Deity.

* * * * *

The Bible and the Holy Spirit

The veracity of the faith of Jesus Christ is dependent on the truthfulness of the Bible. This truthfulness depends upon the inspiration of the Scriptures. If it is not inspired as it claims, it falls beneath the level of honorable writing. It would be a forgery and deception. If it is not inspired it cannot make one wise unto salvation, does not reveal the mind of God and man is left without a guide or anything infallible upon which he can depend. It claims to be inspired of God. Second Timothy 3:16,17, *"All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work."* What does this involve?

In a sense the Bible is a blending of the divine and human. There is the blending of the two in the person of Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us, the Word becoming flesh, God and man in one person. The church is designed of God, established by Christ and He reigns over it as His kingdom. But it is not composed of angels nor spirits, but human beings. So there is the combination of the divine and human. Such can be said of the home. It is a combination of the divine and human. God gave the home

and humans compose it. The Bible in similar fashion blends the divine and human. God chose men to record God's will for man. Inspiration literally means "God-breathed." The writers of the Bible were inspired of God as they wrote. What they wrote came from God, not themselves. Yet, the human element was involved in its production. Inspiration is the divine and miraculous revelation and guidance of God to the human mind. For this reason, God having guided the minds of the writers of the Bible, the Bible is called the Word of God.

Inspiration and Revelation

There is a difference between inspiration and revelation. A revelation is not necessarily inspired of God. Even men often reveal things to other men. Revelation simply means unveiling that which has been veiled. Divine revelation, however, is the result of inspiration. The Bible is a divine revelation because by this means God has revealed Himself and His will to mankind. Deity makes Deity known to humanity and uses humanity to do it.

Theories of Inspiration

There are several theories concocted by theologians about inspiration that might be considered lest we be led astray from the real truth on the subject. Part truth and part error can be very destructive. You ask some religious person today if they believe the Bible is an inspired writing, many will answer that they do. But at the same time they deny that the Bible is the very Word of God. That may sound contradictory but not to them because of what they mean by inspiration. They do not mean what the Bible says, "God-breathed." They mean the writers were moved by some experience, emotion, desire as might be experienced by poets, play-wrights, novelists or literary champions. The thought of the Bible, to them, has no higher source than some exceptionally talented man or group of men, and therefore, does not express the mind of God. This theory is totally foreign to the Biblical teaching regarding the nature of Biblical inspiration.

Others take a rather extreme view and think the Bible has been produced somewhat like a letter a business executive might dictate to his secretary. To them every word and

phrase not only came from the mind of God but there was not any use whatever of the human element except as a stenographer. But this view has complications that cannot be dismissed. It fails to explain why there are different styles of writing as found in the Bible. If God just dictated it and the writers just acted as recorders the same style should prevail throughout the book. But the difference in styles is strong evidence that humanity was involved in the writing of it, serving as more than mere copiers. To be sure, there are portions that are obviously dictation. We shall explain the different styles shortly.

A third false view of inspiration is that God inspired the thoughts and left it to the human writer to express those thoughts the way the writer chose and the best he could. If this be true, the Bible is not really the Word of God but only men's commentary on the Word of God. The entire Bible would be subject to error to the extent that men who wrote may have misunderstood God's thoughts, possibly even completely failing to accurately relate what God intended. This view makes the Bible little more than a private interpretation of God's Word. This is the view that most "translators" of the modern speech versions adopt and for this reason they have taken great liberties with truth.

The Truth on Inspiration

There is a tinge of truth in each of these false theories but the views are false because of the errors in them. Every word did come from God. Every word that is used to express God's thoughts was approved by God and therefore infallible. But God used the talents, vocabularies, styles and even experiences of the writers to reveal His mind. This explains the different styles of writing. God miraculously and directly had the oversight of the writing and made sure that every word was infallible and inerrant; hence, God-breathed.

It is here that we come to the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the inspired Scriptures. It was by and through the Holy Spirit that Deity guided and informed the writers what to write and how to write it. The Holy Spirit is that person of the Godhead that supervised the writing. The Bible is properly called the work of the Holy Spirit. It was the Holy Spirit that exercised the divine power over both

words and thoughts of the Bible. For the sake of space, we shall not give the lengthy quotations of verses that affirm what is said here, but cite references for your personal study. Second Peter 1:21; First Corinthians 2:6-8, 10, 12, 13; Hebrews 1:1; 10:15,16; Acts 28:25; Nehemiah 9:30.

Writers Were Spirit Led

Sometimes the writers wrote of things they had personally experienced. When such was the case the Holy Spirit guided them in the selection of what was to be included and approved the words used. Sometimes the writers wrote of things they could not have experienced. Then the Holy Spirit not only guided the writing, but also supplied the information the writer could not have known otherwise. Therefore, the entire body of Scripture is of divine origin and supervision.

Let us note that both Old and New Testament writers claimed regarding what they wrote. Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon and all the prophets said they were given the Word of God and that the Holy Spirit spoke through them. The Jews divided the Old Testament into three divisions; law, psalms and prophets (Luke 24:44). Jesus Christ placed His stamp of approval on those divisions, endorsing all of them to be God's Word. Forty-five per cent of the words of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are the words spoken by Jesus. Ten per cent are direct quotations. Jesus told the New Testament writers that they were to speak by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 10:20). *"For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you."* Paul affirmed the inspiration, infallibility, inerrancy, all-sufficiency and authority of Scripture in Second Timothy 3:16,17, previously quoted in this lesson. Over and over, from Genesis through Revelation the writers say, *"The Spirit saith expressly," "thus saith the Lord,"* or terms to that effect. There can be no doubt as to the Biblical claim of inspiration. The writers denied they wrote of themselves. There is equally no doubt that the Bible teaches that the Holy Spirit was the Person of Deity that revealed the Word.

The Inspired Word

The recognition of the Bible as the inspired Word of God is all important to the faith of Christ and mankind. If it is

not what it claims to be, what reason is there to accept any portion of it as being valid? If the Bible is nothing more than something totally of man, it has no more authority than anything else anyone else might produce.

God used human beings, their words, styles, talents, experiences, vocabularies, to express His thoughts and reveal His mind and will, miraculously overseeing, revealing, choosing and guiding what was written to assure the completeness and perfectness of what was written. The Holy Spirit accomplished this very work.

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Christ and the Holy Spirit

The relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit is akin to that between Christ and the Father because all three are persons of the Godhead. They are so united and exist in oneness and entwined that what one does all three have a part. There is complete harmony, togetherness and cooperation among all members of the Godhead.

But there are several revelations about the relationship of Christ and the Holy Spirit of which the Bible speaks and when we learn this information we are assisted in better understanding Deity.

There was unity and joint action between Christ and the Holy Spirit at the creation in both the material and spiritual creation. We also read of the prophecies by the Holy Spirit through the inspired writers of the Old Testament of the earthly life of Christ which later became a reality. This shows a direct contact one with the other. The Holy Spirit gave such revelation long before He came.

The Holy Spirit associated with the Second Person of the Godhead (Christ) after Jesus became flesh and was involved in His earthly ministry. This association began

with the incarnation when Christ took on the form of humanity. Luke 1:35, "*The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee; wherefore also the holy thing which is begotten shall be called the Son of God.*" Joseph was told by Gabriel, "*Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.*" (Matthew 1:20). God miraculously fathered the child Jesus by the Holy Spirit.

Other Associations

The Holy Spirit was prominent as He accompanied Jesus wherever He went and in whatever He did. He was at His baptism and transfiguration. He led Him into the wilderness to be tempted of Satan (Mark 1:12). The Scripture says that the presence of the Holy Spirit was with Jesus without measure. John 3:34, "*For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God, for he giveth not the Spirit by measure.*" There was no limitation on the communion between them but Jesus enjoyed the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to the fullest. The life of Jesus was under the control of the Holy Spirit and He manifested Deity to the fullest while on earth. Colossians 2:9, "*For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.*"

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit aided Christ in executing His earthly work. While Christ was the only member of the Godhead to become flesh, the Father and Holy Spirit fully shared in all that Jesus did. It was prophesied by Isaiah and recalled by Jesus (Matthew 12:18) that the Holy Spirit would be with the Messiah while He carried out His work. Matthew 12:28 shows how Jesus did not cast out demons by the power of Satan. He showed that Satan would not cast out demons because that would be destructive of his own evil kingdom. Therefore, inasmuch as the demons or devils were being cast out, it was evident that the power by which He was casting them out was not the power of Satan but the power of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus went into the synagogue in Nazareth He read from the Old Testament, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor.*" Closing the book He said, "*Today hath this scripture*

been fulfilled in your ears." (Luke 4:18,21). By this Jesus acknowledged that He taught and spake by the Holy Spirit.

Cooperation in Everything

Acts 1:2, Jesus gave commandment to His apostles *"through the Holy Spirit."* There can be no question as to their harmonious relationship during the teaching, miracle working, prophecy fulfilling, commandment giving ministry of Christ on earth.

The Holy Spirit was with Jesus in His death and resurrection. Christ shed His blood as an atonement for sin by dying on the cross. His blood became the cleansing power of sin (Hebrews 9:13,14). This was done *"through the eternal Spirit."* After being buried in the borrowed tomb, Jesus rose from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:11).

The crowning work of the Holy Spirit is to glorify Christ, the Redeemer. When Jesus was promising His apostles the coming of the Holy Spirit upon them, and outlining the work of the Holy Spirit, He said, *"He shall glorify me."*

The relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit included cooperation in the creation, prophecy, incarnation, His earthly ministry, and His glorification. It continues in the teaching of the doctrine of Christ that is done by the Holy Spirit through the Word of God.

Christ revealed Deity to man (John 14:8,9). His mission was to do the will of the Father (John 4:34). He also revealed the Holy Spirit. We have a fuller revelation of the Holy Spirit in the teaching of Christ than in any other portion of Scripture. It is not surprising that this is true inasmuch as it is said of Jesus that all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him (Colossians 2:9).

Jesus Taught About the Holy Spirit

John records more of the teaching of Jesus pertaining to the Holy Spirit than any other writer. As already noted, Jesus discussed the reality of the Holy Spirit as a person. He revealed the nature of the Holy Spirit as much as we can know. He outlined the work of the Holy Spirit,

particularly the relationship and its purpose between the Holy Spirit and the apostles. Generally speaking, after Jesus ascended the Holy Spirit would continue the work that Jesus began while on the earth; namely, the salvation of mankind. That work would begin with the apostles. For want of space, instead of quoting the many passages denoting this work, we will only cite them for your investigation. John 14:16,17,16; 15:26; 16:7,13,14; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-8. To summarize, Jesus promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would come upon them, guide them, bring to their remembrance all that Jesus had taught them, provide them with all truth, comfort them, give them power to spread the gospel, enable them to effectively bear witness of Jesus and confirm that which they declared. They would soon after His ascension be baptized (submerged, overwhelmed beneath) the power of the Holy Spirit.

As for the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the world, read John 16:7-11. Jesus outlined the work of the Holy Spirit after His departure. The fulfillment of these promises began with the apostles on the day of Pentecost as recorded in Acts, the second chapter.

On that day, a Jewish feast day that came fifty days after the Passover, and ten days after Jesus ascended, the Holy Spirit did come upon the apostles as promised. There were physical manifestations of His presence such as sound like a mighty wind, tongues as of fire upon each apostle, and the ability of the apostles to speak in tongues or languages they had heretofore never learned or known, but languages that were audible and understandable to their hearers in the language of their hearers. Acts 1:5 says, as promised, they were baptized of the Holy Spirit. That day, for the very first time, the full and whole truth regarding Jesus of Nazareth being the Christ and Savior, the Son of God, was proclaimed. By the coming of the Holy Spirit the apostles sent forth God's plan for the salvation of man through Christ and the beginning of the church or kingdom that had long been foretold.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

This topic merits an entire lesson (which can be read in Volume II, Number 5, page 5). The Holy Spirit was said to come to convict the world of sin, righteousness and

judgment. By the preaching of the Word the apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit and speaking as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:4), people were convinced of sin, righteousness (God's plan for making man righteous), and the coming judgment, hence the necessity to prepare for it. They asked what they had to do and Peter told them to repent and be baptized. By the Holy Spirit the Word was spoken and people were won to Christ and salvation. Through the Word the Holy Spirit continues that work.

In the events of Pentecost we see the relationship of Jesus and the Holy Spirit extended to the establishment of Christ's church which He promised to build upon Himself as the Son of God.

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Measures of the Spirit

Much of the nature and scope of operation of the Holy Spirit can be understood when we understand what is called the measures of the Spirit. All of the actions and powers of the Holy Spirit have not been equally applicable nor equally bestowed to all people. The Holy Spirit was given to the apostles differently than His association with Christ, both of which differs from His relationship with some of the early Christians, all of which differs from the relationship of the Holy Spirit and Christians today. Let us begin our study with John 3:34, *"For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God, for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him."*

Without Measure

We have noted in earlier lessons the relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is evident from John 3:34 that the power and presence of the Holy Spirit abiding with Jesus was to the fullest extent, without measure, without limitations whatsoever. This is what would be expected in view of Colossians 2:9 which teaches that in Jesus dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one Godhead. What involves one, involves

all three. Jesus is the only One of the whom such is said. He is the only One who could qualify for such a description. The first "measure" of the Spirit is actually no measure or limitation at all, but without measure.

Baptismal Measure

But to others there were and are limitations. Consider as a second measure the baptismal measure which was granted to the apostles. All is not revealed about the baptismal measure that we might want to know. This scarcity of revelation has led some to invent theories, speculations and commit errors regarding it. Some have tried to make the baptism of the Holy Spirit force conclusions that, if they were true, would contradict much that is revealed that is simple and clear in revelation. We should be content to abide by what is revealed and whatever else there is, if there is anything else, let it remain with the unrevealed (Deuteronomy 28:29). Foolish and unlearned or untaught questions only create confusion (Second Timothy 2:23)

It was prophesied in Joel 2:28 that the Holy Spirit would come. Peter quotes this prophecy as being fulfilled with the events of Pentecost. The term "*pour*" in Joel is figurative, like term "*fell*," indicating the giving and receiving of the Holy Spirit by the apostles. The measure is not mentioned in this prophecy. But these terms grant no substance to the ridiculous argument that baptism is a pouring. Knowledge of the meaning of baptism allows nothing but immersion, overwhelming, plunging beneath. The apostles were fully submerged under the control of the Holy Spirit in what they taught that day.

John the Baptist had said Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Mark 1:8). Matthew three gives a parallel account and this shows that not all to whom He preached would be so baptized. Some who heard Him were wicked, disobedient, even a "*generation of vipers*." Surely, such were not designated to be the recipients of the baptismal measure. Therefore, it is evident that some to whom He preached would be baptized with the Holy Spirit and some would not. Just who is made clearer when we hear from Jesus and see the fulfillment of the promise. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to the apostles (John 14,15,16, and

Acts 1). They were the ones to whom the Holy Spirit was given in the baptismal measure (Acts 2).

Specifics on Holy Spirit Baptism

There are important specifics about the baptism of the Holy Spirit we must keep in mind. It was miraculous manifestation of divine power. The recipients were endowed with power from on high. It was not for the purpose of saving the recipient from sin, nor to get him into Christ. It was not a command to be obeyed, but a promise to be received. Christ was the administrator, not man. It came not as a result of the petitions and requests of man. It is not the "one baptism" of Ephesians four because that baptism is the baptism being preached and practiced at the time by Paul and others which was baptism in water, in the name of Christ, for the remission of sins, as administered by human beings to penitent believers who had confessed their faith in Christ.

The baptism of the Holy Spirit was designed to accomplish certain purposes and did. It was to clothe the apostles with power from on high (Luke 24:49), endowing them with inspiration and information (John 14, 15, 16, and Acts 2:4). It enabled the apostles to perform the miraculous, even to speak in unlearned but understandable languages (Acts 2:4, 6, 8) and empowered them to perform that which could, would and did confirm the Word they preached (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3,4). Nothing was left that was needed and they were guided as they preached by Deity.

Cornelius

There was another occasion where some have thought it to be an instance of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. We reject that position, however, even though we agree it was a miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit that was in some points like that which occurred on Pentecost. What happened in Acts ten at the house of Cornelius was that the Holy Spirit "*fell*" on them. It does not say they were baptized of the Holy Spirit. When Peter was later explaining the events at Caesarea (Acts 11:15-17) he said it was like that which occurred on Pentecost. But in what respect was it exactly like that which occurred on Pentecost? It was like it in that it was a direct operation of

the Holy Spirit. If it had been the baptismal measure identical to that received by the apostles on Pentecost they would have been as inspired as Peter and Peter would have no need to preach to them at all for they would have possessed as much infallible knowledge and power as he. We rather contend that what Cornelius and his house received was more akin to another measure of the Spirit, a third measure we shall soon discuss, which was usually granted by the laying on of apostolic hands, but in the case of Cornelius was granted directly. The direct action of it has caused some to think it was totally like that on Pentecost. The entire procedure was to convince Jewish brethren that the gospel was for Gentiles as well as Jews, and it did that very thing (Acts 11:18; 15:7-9).

That Paul was baptized of the Holy Spirit at some unspecified and unrecorded time is implied inasmuch as he became an apostle after Pentecost as one born out of due season.

Again, the purpose of the coming of the Holy Spirit in Caesarea was to convince the Jewish brethren who had travelled with Paul to Caesarea, and later the church composed then mostly of Jews, that Gentiles could be saved as well as Jews and the same way.

Gifts of the Spirit

The third measure of the Holy Spirit may be defined as the gifts of the Spirit (First Corinthians 12:1). We must distinguish between the Holy Spirit as a gift (second measure) and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The baptismal measure was a gift of the Holy Spirit in that the Holy Spirit was given and received. But we are now concerned with special gifts, powers, abilities granted to some by the power of the Holy Spirit. These gifts are listed in First Corinthians 12:4-11.

Without investigating each gift specifically in this lesson, let us know that the nature of these gifts was miraculous. They were not given to every Christian but selectively. The gifts were not the same. One person would possess one gift and a second person another and different gift. Possibly some might possess more than one gift. Not every gift was considered of equal value, but all were given by the same

Holy Spirit, each having certain profit and usefulness. They were nine in number in the text cited and fall into three major classifications.

Some gifts were intellectual power, wisdom, knowledge, faith. Some gifts exhibited faith, such as working miracles, healing, ability to know prophecies, teach, foretell, discern spirits, know dispositions and hearts of men. Others were gifts of tongues, the ability to speak and translate languages which were not normal, native and natural to the possessor of the power.

These gifts were destined for temporary use in the church, to be displaced, to end once their purpose was accomplished. That purpose was to be exercised until the full complete revelation of God was attained. They were for the edification of the church (First Corinthians 14:5) and confirmation of the truth (Mark 16:20; First Corinthians 14:22). They served much as does a scaffold in the erection of a building. While under construction the scaffold has a purpose. Once the building is built, it is taken away. The gifts served in the infancy of the church until the full revelation, "*that which is perfect*," had come. Once it had been revealed the gifts were no longer of use. The Word has been given and confirmed (Hebrews 2:3,4). Now men learn and know the will of God for man from inspired, infallible, inerrant, authoritative and all-sufficient Scripture (Second Timothy 3:16, 17).

The Gift of Acts 2:38

Here we read a phrase, "*gift of the Holy Spirit*." This is not a personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit nor a promise of miraculous gifts. Verse thirty-nine defines what is under consideration beginning with the word "*for*," taken from the word "*gar*," which indicates a forthcoming explanation of what has just been said. The "*gift of the Holy Spirit*" is the same as the salvation that was promised through the seed of Abraham. The promise mentioned included those present, their children, the Gentiles, even us and all who will come to Christ. No promise in the Bible is as extensive as that except the promise God made to Abraham that through his seed all nations or families would be blessed, which had reference to Christ (Galatians 3:16).

Third Measure No Longer Given

Not only has the function of the gifts been accomplished but there are other evidences of their termination. Those receiving these gifts did so by the apostles laying hands on them (acts 8,19). Such was the case in Samaria. Philip, on whom apostolic hands had been laid, performed miracles, but obviously could not grant such power to others. It was not until the apostles, John and Peter, came that these gifts were granted to Samaritan brethren. The apostles could work miracles, and could bestow such power on others. But these was unique to them. This power to bestow gifts on others was what Simon wished to buy, but he was told it was not any of his business.

It was after Paul laid hands on those in Ephesus that those people could speak in tongues. His presence was required to grant this power.

With the passing of the apostles, and those on whom they laid hands, so passed the gifts. Furthermore, the purpose of the gifts, to confirm the Word, is already accomplished and there is no need for them. There is today neither person nor purpose for the miraculous. As for those who claim such power, where goes the claim must go the demonstration.

The fourth measure of the Spirit will be discussed in the next lesson. We have noted these three: (1) without measure; (2) baptismal measure; (3) spiritual gifts; as well as the explanation regarding what happened at the house of Cornelius and the gift of the Holy Spirit of Acts 3:38.

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We Had Best Get at It

It seems that time just goes by in such a hurry. I have heard it said that as we grow older it seems to be that way. The Bible certainly teaches life is swift. So if we ever are going to get anything worthwhile done, we better start today and get at it. It will not be long before life is gone. There is much to do little time in which to do it.

The Holy Spirit and Christians Today

This lesson will discuss the fourth measure of the Holy Spirit as a follow up to a previous lesson. While Christians today do not have the same association with the Holy Spirit as did Christ, nor has he nor can he have the same baptismal measure as did the apostles, nor does he nor shall he possess miraculous spiritual gifts, there is a relationship between the Holy Spirit and Christians today. We can speak of this as fellowship and as the Spirit dwelling in us and us in the Spirit (Romans 8:9; First Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; Second Timothy 1:13,14). There can be no doubt that the Holy Spirit is active in the life of a Christian and acts on the behalf of the Christian. But there is a vast difference in saying the Holy Spirit dwells and abides in us and with us and saying how He does this.

The Scripture also asserts that the Father and Son dwell in us (Second Corinthians 6:16; First John 4:5; Colossians 1:27; Ephesians 3:17). Therefore, in addition to the dwelling with the Holy Spirit, all members of the Godhead are said to dwell in us. All three direct and influence our lives by the power they exercise. How Deity exercises this power we must learn from passages other than those cited.

Galatians 3:2 teaches that the Galatian Christians received the Holy Spirit by the hearing of faith, the message of faith, the gospel. The way the Holy Spirit abides with the Christian is by the gospel. The faith comes by the preaching of the gospel (Romans 10:17), never separate and apart from the Word. The Holy Spirit was received when people heard and properly responded to the gospel. That this in Acts 2:38 does not refer to miraculous powers has been studied in the previous lesson and to so contend is to force an unwarranted conclusion.

Ephesians 3:7 teaches that Christ dwells in our hearts by faith. But again, faith comes by hearing the Word, as in Galatians 3:2. There is no dwelling of Christ in us apart from the Word.

Filled With the Spirit

Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:18 are parallel passages. To be "*filled with the Spirit*" is to "*let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.*" Therefore, it is certain that the Godhead dwells with and in the faithful Christian leading and influencing by the Word. This is the way the Father and Son sustained their relationship (John 15). All of the influences on the human heart by the Holy Spirit are accomplished through the hearing and application of the Word. Without the Word there is no relationship.

The doctrine that there is a personal and actual indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the physical body of the Christian is foreign to the truth and there is nothing in Scripture that will sustain such a doctrine when we take all that the gospel teaches on the subject. We are not "little deities" walking about as one would have to conclude if the personal indwelling doctrine were true. As we obey the Word of Deity, so we have fellowship with Deity. The dwelling one with another is just another way of expressing the fellowship humanity can and does enjoy with Deity when one is in the Lord.

Holy Spirit Leads

Romans 8:14 teaches we are led by the Spirit. But how does the Spirit lead? It is not by some mysterious, miraculous, better-felt-than-told experience. We are not to expect a direct operation as was received by Noah, Abraham and Paul. But we are guided by the Word of truth that God has provided for us. There is no question that the Spirit leads, but we must remember He leads by and through the Word of God.

Romans 8:16,17 teaches that the Holy Spirit testifies that we the children of God. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit we could neither be the children of God nor could know that we are the children of God. But the testimony of the Spirit, not to our spirits, but with the testimony of our

spirits, we can know we are God's children. The Spirit has testified what is God's way of saving us. Our spirits can testify whether we have done as God has commanded. The two testimonies together, one with the other, informs us of our spiritual state. The testimony of the Spirit is in the Word of God.

Source of Comfort

The Holy Spirit is a source of comfort to the Christian. Jesus identified Him as the Comforter to the apostles and through them to us as we follow their doctrine (John 14:1-4; Second Corinthians 1:3,4). Paul wrote in Second Corinthians 7:4, "*I am filled with comfort.*" The early church enjoyed the comfort of the Spirit (Acts 9:31). The Christian is comforted by the words Paul wrote in First Thessalonians 4:18. The things written aforetime were for our comfort through the Scriptures (Romans 15:4). In times of distress, sorrow and weakness we seek God's comfort from His Word and our knowledge of it. The promises found therein given to Christians serve as the basis of our comfort and hope and are the work of the Holy Spirit. "*Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*" (First Thessalonians 4:18). The words are of the Holy Spirit.

In Growth

The Holy Spirit assists us in our spiritual growth. Once having become a Christian we are to grow (Second Peter 3:18). Romans 15:16 teaches we are "*sanctified by the Holy Spirit.*" Just as the work of the Holy Spirit is involved in converting us to Christ, His work continues in our growth in Christ. We become more and more like a son rather than the servant of sin that we were as we partake of that which is offered through the Spirit. The Spirit does this work through the Word. We are sanctified by the Word (John 17:17). Having been set apart from our sins and from the world by obeying the Word, we grow as we feed upon the sincere milk and meat of the Word.

Even though we are forced to conclude that the Holy Spirit operates on man through the Word, let us not confuse the Holy Spirit as being the same thing as the Word. While there is perfect harmony between the Word and the Spirit, the Word is the instrument and means used by the Spirit to

operate on man. It is similar as a surgeon operates on his patient by the use of his instruments. What the Scripture attributes to the Holy Spirit as to leading, guiding, directing and influencing man, saint and sinner, is also said of the Word because the Word is used by the Spirit to this end. Ephesians 6:17 speaks of the Word as *"the sword of the Spirit."*

To Us and For Us

There is another work and service rendered on behalf of the Christian for the Christian. Let us distinguish between what the Spirit does **to** us and what He does **for** us. What He does to us is by the Word. What all Deity may do for us we must confess limited knowledge for there is limited revelation in this area and we do not profess to comprehend all the workings of Deity.

There are those things that are done for us. Because of the dwelling of the Spirit, the Spirit serves as an intercessor for us (Romans 8:26,27). Again, there is a difference between a mediator and an intercessor. We have only one mediator (First Timothy 2:5) and that is Jesus Christ. There may be many intercessors, even as we can intercede on behalf of each other in prayer (First Timothy 2:1). But we learn that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us. He intercedes according to the will of God and does not bypass the Christ through whom we must go to come before God. A mediator is one that acts between two parties by belonging to both parties. An intercessor pleads on the behalf of another, representing another. Christ is both mediator and an intercessor. The Holy Spirit intercedes, as stated, even we can intercede for each other.

For instance, there be those times when we cannot pray as we ought, but even then our groanings are taken before the throne of heaven through Christ and offered to God by the intercession of the Holy Spirit. We are aware that some have a different view of Romans 8:26, but their views separate man from his own spirit as if they were different entities. We are confident the above view is consistent with Scripture throughout.

What a glorious blessing it is to know that the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf and takes into account our

sufferings that may well disable us from praying to God as we ought. Because of this intercession we can proclaim as did Paul that He *"is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."* (Ephesians 3:20).

Providence

We must note the difference between Deity dwelling in us and the providence of God. By the providence of God we refer to the participation of Deity in the affairs of men even though we know not how He does it except through natural means. Like the Biblical assertion that Deity dwells in us and we in Deity, we accept the Biblical assertion of the providence of God and have no reason to dismiss it just because we do not fully understand all involved in its operation.

Providence is not a miraculous operation. God answers prayer by providence today, not the miraculous. The life of Joseph is a good example of the providence of God in operation. We dare not attribute everything that occurs in life as the operation of God's providence because many things happen in which God has no involvement. Sin often brings certain conditions upon mankind and God does not bring them. There be those things that happen even to Christians simply because Christians are in this world and are human and experience many things such as are common to the human family.

We see the providence of God in operation in the life of Esther, especially as Mordecai explained to her, *"Who but knows that thou art come to the kingdom for such as time as this?"* As the account of the life of Esther unfolds we see God's providence in operation to the preservation of His people that were still in bondage.

Fruit of the Spirit

One other area of association between the Holy Spirit and the Christian today that we mention is that the Christian is to bear good fruit (John 15:8), and that is the fruit of the Spirit as listed in Galatians 5:22,23. Such fruit will distinguish us as Christians and identify us as Christ's disciples. Such fruit drives evil from our lives as well as motivating us to righteousness.

While Christians today have a different relationship with the Holy Spirit than some in the infancy of the church, we are thankful for what the Scripture reveals concerning our present fellowship with Deity, including all three persons of the Godhead.

* * * * *

One More Lesson to Come on the Holy Spirit

This issue has presented five lessons related to the Holy Spirit. While we are not so naive as to think everyone will agree with everything we have presented, we are confident such teaching is true and consistent with what Scripture reveals on these themes. Space prohibited us from including a sixth lesson that we have intention of presenting as the first article in the next issue. It will be entitled, Against the Holy Spirit.

Our inability to fully comprehend all there is about Deity, even all that is revealed in Scripture about Deity, is not due to any inadequacy on the part of Deity. It is because we are limited and finite human beings. If we were to be able to grasp all there is about Deity we would be as Deity. None should ever be so brazen and bold as to become overly dogmatic about his knowledge of Deity.

But fortunately, we have sufficient revelation and we can understand so much of it that we search the Scriptures and conform our thinking accordingly.

* * * * *

Please do not get angry with anyone for opposing denominations. Jesus said, *"Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up."*
Matthew 15:13.

Always Attendance

So often it seemed that every time he went to the doctor the doctor talked about being overweight and warned against the danger to his health. He became rather sensitive about it. Can you guess what was the problem with this particular patient? Yes, it applied to him.



JAMES W. BOYD

When he occasionally went to worship it seemed that somebody would mention to him how they missed him so frequently from worship and sincerely wished he would not be absent because it endangered his soul. He became sensitive about it. Can you guess what was the problem with this particular brother? Yes, it applied. Anyway, how could he know what they always talked about? He was among them so infrequently he could never tell.

* * * * *

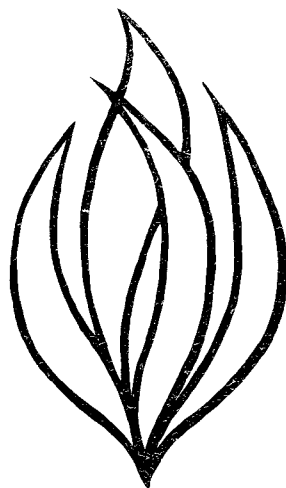
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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).



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Against the Spirit

This is the sixth in a series of six lessons concerning the Holy Spirit, including the Holy Spirit as a Person in the Godhead, His relationship with Christ and involvement in producing the Bible, the four measures of the Spirit and the present day relationship with the Christian. Scripture also has somewhat to say about being against the Holy Spirit. Whatever is included in being against the Holy Spirit, it is certainly spiritually disastrous. We read of people resisting the Spirit, lying to the Spirit, defiling the temple of the Holy Spirit, despising the Spirit, grieving the Spirit, quenching the Spirit and blaspheming the Spirit. These fall into the category of being against the Spirit.

Resisting the Spirit

Acts 7:51: Stephen charged his Jewish hearers with resisting the Holy Spirit like their Israelite forefathers had done. How had the forefathers resisted the Holy Spirit? It was by refusing to heed the message of God as proclaimed by God's prophets. The prophets were directed in their preaching and warning by the Spirit (Nehemiah 9:30). To refuse the message was to resist the Spirit. Making this charge led to the stoning of Stephen. But even today, when people resist God's message from His inspired Word, the Bible, which was given through the Spirit, they are also guilty of resisting the Holy Spirit.

Acts 5:3,9: Annanias and Saphirra sold property and gave a portion of the proceeds to the apostles for the work. Their sin was pretending to have given all and lying about what they did. Lying is the very opposite of truth and diametrically opposed to Deity and everything for which Deity stands. So abominable is lying that liars are said to be among those who will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, the second death (Revelation 20:8). Peter said they had lied to the Holy Spirit.

A Serious Matter

Man sometimes does not realize the seriousness of sin. When one lies he lies to more than just his fellowman, but

also to God. Every sin is against God and lying is said to be a sin against the Holy Spirit.

First Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:19,20: When we study these passages we are no longer made to wonder why faithful gospel preachers have and continue to preach against drinking alcoholic beverages, smoking, overeating, fornication and other abuses of the body, often committed by evil behavior and bad habits. Christians realize their body belongs to God. We are not our own but have been bought with a price, the blood of Christ. We have no right to defile the body because it is said to be the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The temple in the Old Testament was a sacred building, the dwelling place of Deity. To defile the temple was a grievous sin and brought God's wrath against the violator. In Jesus' day, on two occasions, He drove those out who made His Father's house a den of robbers. They were defiling the temple.

God now dwells, not in temples made with hands (Acts 17), but in His people. Your very body is said to be the temple of Deity. As one follows the Word, Deity dwells in him. Deity is no less displeased now than back then when people defile the temple. To do so is to sin against the Holy Spirit.

Despising the Spirit

Hebrews 10:26-29: Here we read of despising the Holy Spirit. The word "despise" means to insult or treat with contempt. How does one do such a thing toward the Third Person of the Godhead? It is by falling away from the truth having once accepted it. Hebrews was written to forestall apostasy or departing from the faith. To become a Christian and then fall away into unfaithfulness for whatever reason or excuse is said to be the same as trampling underfoot the saving and sanctifying blood of Jesus Christ.

People were sorely punished for violating the Law of Moses. How much worse it is to turn from the salvation given by Jesus, God's Son. When we consider how the Lord looks upon unfaithfulness, we are made to see how important it is for us to ever be faithful. To turn back to the

lost state from which we have come is said to treat the Holy Spirit with insult and contempt.

Grieving the Spirit

Ephesians 4:30: How does one grieve the Holy Spirit? Notice the sins in the context of Ephesians 4:25-32. There are sins of doing what ought not be done. There are sins of failing to do what ought to be done. Lying, losing the temper, holding grudges, letting the devil have his way in your life, stealing, refusing to work, refusing to give to the needy, evil language, neglecting to teach, holding wrath and bitterness in the heart, failing to be kind, forgiving and tenderhearted are all listed. Just as you may grieve over that which is contrary to your desires, so these actions are contrary to the Spirit's message and brings grief to Him when people commit them.

Quenching the Spirit

First Thessalonians 5:19: "*Quench not the Spirit.*" The figure here implies that the Holy Spirit is like a fire and lights the fire of goodness in our hearts and lives. When one is so ignited he has a burning zeal to do the Lord's will and has a passion for doing right. To prevent the Holy Spirit from igniting a fire for righteousness within us would be to quench the Spirit. To discourage, hinder or otherwise block the spread of God's Word and doing of good works authorized of God is like pouring water on a fire and quenching its power. People sometimes "throw cold water" on first one good work and then another. We must be careful lest we become guilty of quenching something that the Holy Spirit takes delight in igniting. The Holy Spirit ignites by and through the Word. Therefore, we need to learn the Word and apply it lest we quench it and the Holy Spirit.

Blaspheming the Spirit

Matthew 12:31,32: The sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a much disputed matter. It is sometimes called the unpardonable sin. Blasphemy is a sin seen throughout the history of the human race toward Deity. It would be naive to suggest that the identification of this sin is as simple as some would contend because honest, well-informed and

good men often differ in their view as to what this sin is. As with other matters where revelation is scarce, it is unbecoming to be overly dogmatic in conclusions drawn regarding blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

We are taught many times that Christ came to save mankind from all sin. His blood can wash away any and all sins provided one meets the terms of forgiveness and obeys the conditions. Any sin becomes unpardonable if and when one ignores God's plan. We believe this is the teaching in First John 5:16 regarding the "*sin which is not unto death*" and "*a sin unto death.*" This is not the same as the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Some say the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit was giving the devil credit for the miracles Jesus performed. Certainly to do that would be a vicious attack against Christ and the Holy Spirit. But we are not convinced this is all there is involved in determining the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Others are inclined to consider this sin to be the deliberate and continued repudiation and rejection of the testimony of the Spirit, remaining in open rebellion and disobedience against the Spirit until death. This also is a view with problems.

Jesus said whoever spoke against Him would be forgiven (assuming conditions are met), but to speak against the Spirit would not be forgiven. Blasphemy does involve speaking against the Spirit. Just what reason there is that speaking against Christ should be less fatal than speaking against another member of the Godhead is not made clear to me. There were those who spoke against Christ during His earthly ministry who were offered opportunity to accept Christ and be saved beginning with Pentecost. In fact, it is reasonable to think that some who even attributed the working of miracles by Christ to the devil rather than the Holy Spirit heard the same offer. Some who were urged to accept Christ during His ministry refused, but when the message of the gospel delivered by the Holy Spirit was preached they had opportunity to obey. But if they rejected that message, where else could they turn for salvation? The only way to be sure you can never be forgiven of sin is to turn down the Word of the Holy Spirit regarding Christ and His will. The gospel is God's power to save (Romans 1:16). To reject the Spirit-given gospel is spiritually fatal.

Only by accepting it can one be saved and eventually see heaven. This seems to be the more consistent view of what this sin involves.

To sin against the Spirit in any of the above ways is to erect a barrier between ourselves and our goal of heaven. Rather than sinning against the Spirit, may we open our hearts to the Word of the Spirit in all things and receive Him as we receive the truth He has delivered and is now embodied in the Scriptures.

* * * * *

A Four-Fold Indictment

We in America live in a most blessed land. But there is good reason for Christians to be concerned about our nation. If our nation is distorted, cursed and despised over the world, and often it is, it may be partially due to our own failures. One of the responsibilities of the church in uncertain and unstable times is to tell of those things that are certain and changeless. It is our duty to send forth the warnings of God and the admonition that, "*Righteousness exalteth a nation, and sin is a reproach to any people.*" (Proverbs 14:34). This is what is intended by this brief lesson and we solicit the eye and ear of the honest, knowing that the dishonest do not care anyway.

Before tragedy fell upon the nation of Judah, God's prophet Zephaniah wrote, "*She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the Lord; she drew not near to her God.*" (Zephaniah 3:2). Here is a four-fold indictment against that nation. While they could hear, they would not listen. They refused to obey. The voice of God was ignored. They were unwilling to accept discipline and correction. They trusted not in God but in other things, even themselves. They did not draw nigh to Him Who had so blessed them.

Whether we are dealing with a person, city or nation, God's truths and indictments against sin are the same. Here were a people whose consciences had been seared by

the hot iron of rebellion. Their heart was not honest before God. They refused to be taught, having cast away faith in favor of folly. They allowed their relationship to God to deteriorate. Which of these four indictments could be applicable to our own blessed land? Which might be applicable to me or you as individuals? The four indictments are related rather than totally separate. A good conscience functions when truth has been accepted. Truth, when accepted, produces faith in God. Faith in God is necessary for a proper relationship with God and ignites obedience. Let me say it another way. When the right relationship to God is broken because faith is abandoned, then truth will be denied, which allows the conscience to become seared and insensitive. Consider these indictments one by one.

Disobedience

First, "*She obeyed not the voice.*" Whose voice? God's voice is the one in particular, but really they listened to nobody. Here was the hard heart in operation. Some people simply will NOT pay attention even to God and will stand in defiance of evidence they cannot refute, but can only ignore. Is there not something wrong with the conscience of many of our people when blinded by the material and sensual gratifications, wallowing in prejudices, following the wisdom of this world rather than God? The statistics are staggering when reports are made about the immoralities among our population. We will not cite any here because they change so rapidly. But with the increase of sexual sins, crimes, riots, rebellions, desecration of things holy and sacred, what justification is there to say America is getting better rather than worse?

Historians tell us that our land is the most immoral and undisciplined people on earth today. There is less respect for authority and the weakest kind of religious faith among the oncoming generation than has been in our history. This is to speak generally because there are many individual exceptions. But parents are more permissive, less involved and concerned, negligent, selfish, materially ambitious than our nation has witnessed. Some are not even concerned and would deny this is true. But the truth exists even when those who hate truth deny it. Wishing truth away or denying it does not change it.

Parents and young people today have the greatest challenges and obstacles against doing right than probably any generation in our history. For this reason we truly admire those who refuse to bow to evil, even though the proportion of such people in our overall population seems to grow smaller with each decade.

With the moral, political and religious decay so much in evidence there are still those who will say, "Sleep on." Do they care nothing for the oncoming generation? There are some "Christians" who lend their support to the very forces, political and educational, that are working steadfastly to undermine and destroy every vestige of the faith of Christ from the life of this nation. America's conscience is not so sensitive to sin. The media exploits and advances this insensitivity.

While the moral degradation is extensive, what may even be worse is the willingness of people to accept it, live with it, "go along to get along." We rapidly are becoming a nation where the voice of God is seldom heard above the noises coming from the dins of iniquity.

Will Not Hear

Second, "*She received not instruction.*" It is not that no instruction was given. But you cannot tell some people anything, anytime, about any subject. They know it all even if they are heading to destruction. Our people are willing to deny truth and reality about God, morality and things sacred. They deny the failures, sins and true conditions of our homeland. Many reject all discipline, crying, "Freedom," when what they mean is license to sin. They disrespect duly ordained authority on every level, being swelled with self-pride and arrogance against God.

Meanwhile, others are like Pilate. They either wash their hands of it, or ask, "What is truth?" as if there is no such thing. Many know right from wrong but refuse to act accordingly. They, like Jerusalem and Judah, smart under instruction and the exposure of their transgressions. With sophistication, they dismiss the warnings of God and remain smug rather than sincere.

Israel stoned the prophets sent to her rather than accept the message they brought. So it is often the case today in principle. What preacher who truly stands for the truth is warmly received by the masses today? Yes, there are those preachers who are warmly received. They are more the servants of the devil seeking their own gain and glory by pleasing their hearers rather than being angels of light they profess to be. How did Herod and Herodias treat John when he told them the truth? What did the Jews do to Jesus when He told them the truth? Those kind of people are not all dead and not all of them are outside the church.

No Trust

Third, "*She trusted not in the Lord.*" They said they believed in the Lord but they lived as if God was dead. They did not abandon their rituals and ceremonies, even their long flowing robes (which are plentiful among religionists today). We might say they "went to church," but their true love was the way of the world, not of God. They compromised their faith enough to be comfortable as they were, going their own way, the Word of the Lord notwithstanding. Like many today, they paid lip service to God even while their heart was far from Him. Religious but not righteous was their character.

In our nation's pledge of allegiance to our flag, we say, "One nation under God." On our money we read, "In God we trust." We open ball games with a prayer and even Congress begins with prayer. Some want prayer in schools, but laws prohibit it, allowing rather the teaching of anti-God theories to be taught. America has been known in history as the land that trusts in her wealth and weapons. There has been much said about America's trust in God. Doubtless this is true of many even yet. Our land was founded by God-fearing people and our laws reflect their faith in Almighty God. But what must God think as we elect godless leaders and see their revelry and corruption? What must God think when we see evidences of greed, lust, sensuality, violence and dishonesty on every hand, and immorality paraded as if there is nothing wrong with it? What must God think of our motto and printed money when the ravages of the alcoholic beverages sweep the land and laws are legislated to advance its profitability to its producers and the havoc to its victims relatively ignored?

Do we really think God is impressed that America trusts Him? While many openly denounce Him and His ways and even "believers" timidly and passively sit idly by, why should He continue to bless America?

Not Draw Near

Fourth, "*She drew not near to her God.*" Because Jerusalem had seared her conscience and silenced her prophets, rebelled in corruption, denied truth and abandoned faith, it came eventually to that last step of severing relationship with God altogether.

Communication with God is a two-way street. God speaks to man by and through His inspired and all-sufficient Word. Mankind speaks to God through prayer. How shall we stand if we cut our tie with God in both personal and national life? How shall we avoid impending ruin that our enemies seek if we reject the only power, strength and hope we really have, who is the God of righteousness?

Our recovery and survival depends upon our waking from our spiritual slumber, stupor and indifference and return to God. We must establish again our ties with God, trust Him, accept His corrections and instructions and obey His voice. The need of our day is to come to Christ, personally, one by one, in obedience to the gospel and conformity to His will in daily life. Do you agree?

* * * * *

Moment for Reflection

By the time you read this issue of my sermons the year 1990 will be almost finished. Indeed, life is as a swift ship (Job 9:26). Whatever we intend to do this year must be done very soon. But we still have time to plan for a productive year for 1991, if the Lord wills. Let us use our time wisely for it passes us by so rapidly. JB

Gehenna

Truth has two sides. One is pleasant and the other unpleasant. There are lessons that are pleasant to study and others are very disturbing because they contain some very hard sayings. But to preach the "*whole counsel of God*" (Acts 20:27), we must preach both sides.

People have various attitudes toward hell. Some deny there is such a place just as they deny there is a heaven. Some contend for the place of reward but deny there is a place of punishment. Such inconsistency! Others say they believe there is a hell but never preach about it, or try to gloss over it and soften the horrors of it. Some dislike the appeal to fear for serving God. It cannot be denied that the revelation of hell does cause fear. But while love is the highest motive for serving God, fear is a lesser motive and a very real one. God uses it. Hebrews 10:31, "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*"

Two Sides of God

The Bible teaches that God is merciful, kind, loving, gracious, gentle, forgiving and of such qualities of tenderness as a Father who loves His children. But it also teaches that God is just, righteous, holy and is a God of wrath and anger. Justice demands reward and punishment. God could not be just if He treated goodness and evil just alike. The holiness and righteousness of God demands that He be angry toward wickedness.

In the book of Revelation we have suggestions of the grandeur and glory of heaven. Words cannot adequately describe how glorious it is. Neither can words adequately describe hell. But there is sufficient description of both to make it easy for us to decide which we prefer.

There is punishment after death and the judgment. We have other lessons that substantiate this fact but for the

sake of space will not go into that area here. But there should be no doubt in your mind of this truth.

The Place

This place of punishment is called hell (Matthew 10:28; 23:33). This is the word "gehenna," used twelve times in the New Testament. It comes from the Hebrew word "Gohinnom" or the Valley of Hinnom. This valley was a deep and narrow glen south of Jerusalem where Ahaz introduced worship to the fire gods and Jews even offered their children to the false god, Molech. It became an abominable place to the faithful Jew. Later it became the location of the common refuse, the city dump, into which were cast the bodies of animals, criminals and all sorts of filth. There they were burned. Because of the depth and continual burning there, with smoke ascending from it, it became the symbol of the place of spiritual punishment and from whence hell took its name. This place of punishment is synonymous with the second or spiritual death.

Who?

The Bible informs us who shall inhabit hell? Most people will go there (Matthew 7:13,14). This is a hard saying and harder to realize. It is distressing to think that any one of us might be in that number.

Hell is the place for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). The list of evildoers in Revelation 21:8 and Galatians 5:19-21 shows us who shall inhabit hell. There are only two spiritual kingdoms and two spiritual destinies. One kingdom belongs to God and is destined for heaven. The other kingdom is of the devil and it bound for hell. Those who work the works of the flesh and follow the ways of sin are in Satan's kingdom and under his dominion. These have justified expectation of hell.

Persecutors of the church shall be in hell (Revelation 20:19). So shall these who obey not the gospel (Second Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Christians who fall away and are not restored, who depart into apostasy, will be there (Second Peter 2:20-22). How this should arouse the lukewarm, indifferent, lethargic,

negligent, worldly-minded member of the church! How this should warn those who introduce unauthorized innovations and doctrines among brethren! How this should motivate us to good works (James 4:17), and encourage us to "*abstain from all appearance of evil.*" (First Thessalonians 5:22). How this should provoke us to "*seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness!*" (Matthew 6:33).

Description

Hell is as ugly and dreadful as heaven is marvelous and beautiful. Hell is a place of suffering (Matthew 25:30). The descriptions of the New Testament are penetrating to the mind of the most awesome suffering one can imagine, and beyond imagination. It is a place of fire and brimstone (Revelation 20:10). The fire is unquenchable (Mark 9:44,45). It is a lake of fire (Revelation 20:15), a veritable baptism of fire (Matthew 3:12). It is a furnace of fire (Matthew 13:42).

It is also described as a place of outer darkness (Matthew 25:30), removed from the "*Father of lights.*" Some may ask, "How can there be fire and darkness at the same time?" My answer is that I do not know nor do I have to know to believe it. I have confidence in the revelation of God's Word, knowing He speaks of spiritual things here. It will be as God declares it whether I understand it all or not. Friend, you had best do the same thing!

Eternal

Just like heaven in one respect, hell will never end (Matthew 25:46). It is a place where the worm dieth not (Mark 9:44). Some teach that the wicked, at their death, will be annihilated and cease to exist. But the Scripture teaches that there is existence for both the righteous and the wicked after death (John 5:28,29), and there is consciousness (Luke 16:19-31).

Hell will be a place of regret for all who go there. So many will be in hell that could have so easily escaped it. They will have had numerous opportunities and there were those who constantly urged them to obey God and be saved. They will remember those invitation songs and those prayers

and loved ones who loved them enough to warn them and plead with them. If they had one more opportunity to leave the "*wages of sin*" they would not have any hesitation. But their opportunities will be gone and no hope remains.

What of Me?

As we study this subject, we are also aware that most people never think of hell except in terms of other people, seldom themselves. Some never think of it at all, except to use the word in their profanity. But realizing that the same Bible that tells of salvation and heaven also warns of sin and hell, we are sobered into the reality that we must do the will of our Creator. If we go to hell, it will not be because God wants us to perish (Second Peter 3:9). It will be because we refused to accept His gift of salvation offered through Christ. How foolish we be to deny ourselves of His bounty, but invite upon ourselves the wrath of a just God!

* * * * *

The Lord and Hagar

Genesis 16:1-11 should be read with this lesson. By the time of our text, God had already made great promises to Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation, the nation would have its own land, his descendants would be numberless, and through his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. These things were stated even though Abraham had no heir. Furthermore, he and his wife, Sarah, were old and she had always been barren. Yet, God promised him they would have a son through whom these things would come to pass.

Sarah's Plan

Sarah seemed to have decided God promised too much and needed some assistance. She devised the plan whereby she could provide Abraham an heir through her handmaid, Hagar. Inasmuch as Hagar was her servant the child would belong to Sarah and Abraham.

After Hagar conceived, trouble arose between Hagar and Sarah. As is the case, human plans that are substitutes for God's plan breed trouble. Because it was thought to be a reproach for a woman to be barren, Hagar looked with contempt upon Sarah and became arrogant and superior in her attitude toward her. Her rebellious ways and unsubmitive spirit toward her mistress was a mistake. It soon became intolerable for Sarah.

Sarah had the power to do something about it and told Abraham that he must put Hagar in her place. Abraham told her, "*Do to her as it pleaseth thee.*" Sarah dealt with her harshly until Hagar fled from her presence into the wilderness. Hagar's behavior had brought her sorrow and despair, taking her from the necessities of life to doom.

By now Hagar must have felt that nobody cared for her. It certainly seemed that way as far as those around her were concerned. Even though part of the problem had been self-imposed, she had also been a victim of maltreatment from others. She felt as the Psalmist once wrote, "*No man cared for my soul.*" We see a lonely, helpless, desperate slave woman with child in the wilderness reaping what she and others had brought to pass.

Hope for Hagar

But the situation changed and a ray of hope and light beamed upon her because the Lord cared. He came to her and inquired about her. It always makes a difference when the Lord is near. Even though Hagar was not a deserving person, not of the family of Abraham but an Egyptian and a slave, yet, the Lord cared. This must impress us. There is no such thing as an unimportant person in the sight of God.

Hagar, at this low point in life, was much like others now in the world. They are not deserving because of their conduct and are outcasts, often due to their fault. Proverbs 13:15, "*The way of the transgressor is hard.*" Sinners make life difficult for themselves and often have nobody else to blame but themselves.

Other people can see the sinner in trouble and lacking sympathy and compassion pass it off with, "He is getting

his just desserts.” Too few are really touched with the plight of the weary, downtrodden, discouraged, lost and condemned. Like the priest and Levite, many of us pass by on the other side. We need more Samaritans!

But our God is a God who cares even for the unworthy. Peter said, “*Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.*” (First Peter 5:7). What a gracious, comforting and beautiful thought! We can be thankful for such a God who cares for the unworthy because we all qualify. We all sin and deserve spiritual death (Romans 3:23; 6:23). We can be glad Christ died for us while we were yet sinners (Romans 5:6-8). Hagar had reacted badly to her blessings and had been brought down. There was no place to go and none to whom she could turn, except God. In this humbled state, she sought God and the Lord heard her affliction (Genesis 16:11). The Lord helped her after she had “*looked after him.*” (Genesis 16:13).

When Do You Seek God?

It is not uncommon for people to omit seeking God while enjoying sufficiency. Often people never “*look after him*” until they reach the end of their rope. Not until something or somebody humbles them do some ever turn to God. In fact, God cannot and will not do for the proud, haughty, self-sufficient person. Such a one is simply beyond help in that state. It is significant that before Peter said, “*He careth for you,*” (First Peter 5:7), that he wrote, “*Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in due time.*” (First Peter 5:5,6). When we realize we are hopeless, helpless, doomed and damned apart from God, we will find it easier to sacrifice pride, self-will, selfishness and stubbornness or whatever else that hinders us from coming to God. Out in the wilderness Hagar was alone, not needed, unwanted. But in that wilderness she was given opportunity and found the door of recovery and redemption after she humbled herself.

The Way for Hagar

The Lord gave Hagar instructions that would relieve her of chaos. “*Return to thy mistress; and submit thyself under*

her hands." There was the need of spiritual correction. She was told to repent, turn around, go back, do whatever she must to make amends and start over. This would require "losing face," and admitting guilt, acknowledging error and repudiation of her former ways. It demanded the opposite of pride. But repentance and submission was the only way to restoration. *"Return... and submit thyself... I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude."* *"Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shall call his name Ishmael."*

The name Ishmael means "God hears." Even when no one else was listening, none seemed to care, God cared and heard and offered the way back. She went back, doing as God instructed, resumed her place, gave birth to her son who became the father of a multitude of mighty people.

The encounter between the Lord and Hagar is very similar to that between God and people today. Having alienated ourselves from God by our own sins, we must "lose face," humble ourselves before God and man, seek the Lord in our affliction.

The Lord's instruction to us is similar to that given to Hagar. Return and submit! Repent and obey! For those who will there awaits the reward of forgiveness, fellowship with Deity and the promise of eternal life. Otherwise, there is nothing before us but death in the wilderness of sin.

* * * * *

A Strong Home Base

Matthew 7:21-27, *"Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built*

his house upon a rock; and the rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew and beat upon that house and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock. And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not shall be likened unto a man which built his house upon the sand, and the rain descended, the floods came and the winds blew and beat upon that house, and it fell: and great was the fall of it."

That which is built on a strong foundation has durability and dependability. That which is built upon a weak foundation cannot stand under the pressures, tests and trials. The great strength of the Lord's church is the Lord Himself, its foundation of truth, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" (Matthew 16:16).

The Church

The church must be strong because of its task as the "*pillar and ground of the truth.*" (First Timothy 3:15). It is built on truth and supports the truth. A weak church cannot fulfill its mission regarding truth.

It is through the church, the corporate body, that much of the activity of a Christian is expedited and discharged. Of course, he has his individual duties as a Christian that does not include the entire body. There is no super governing body in the New Testament church larger than the eldership over a single local congregation. The local church serves as the home base of operations. To do its work it must be a strong home base. Brethren of a local church undertake certain work, obligating themselves in benevolence, preaching, teaching, at home and abroad, guidance and worship. To assume such responsibility is a privilege as well as an obligation. The church has an interest in the physical and spiritual welfare, not only of those who are members of the body of Christ, but all men everywhere. Millions are dependent upon the local churches doing their duty. We must give a good account of ourselves in the home church and this demands a strong home base which the local church is.

For a local church to be a strong home base it must possess certain qualities without which it cannot do its work. These qualities are of such nature that there is always

room for growth and improvement. Where they do not exist, they can be developed. Where they do exist they can be expanded and improved.

To the Truth

A strong home base must be devoted and dedicated to the truth. How can a church be the pillar and ground of the truth when there is laxity toward the truth? Regardless of how many missions it supports, benevolent work it does, activities it promotes, a church builds only wood, hay and stubble and cannot stand the final test if not dedicated to the truth. This means the Bible is first, last and always the standard of measure and source of authority. Unless a "*thus saith the Lord*" dominates and overshadows everything pertaining to that church, unless the church is led by the revealed oracles of God, it cannot and will not be a strong home base.

Leadership

A strong home base must have a strong leadership, which includes elders, deacons, preachers and teachers who lead in different capacities. The preaching must be Biblical, vigorous and planned. Elders must lead by upholding the Word, living an exemplary life and making decisions with discretion, wisdom and compassion.

How could a church be considered strong if those in the lead are not devoted, involved, wise and have a proper mixture of gentleness and firmness? There must be visions, confidence, imagination and faith in the cause. Leaders must be out front showing the way, quick to encourage, never losing contact with followers, but always anxious to serve and help.

Leadership must also be willing to obey God and purge from the members those who persist in unfaithfulness. This failure causes grief to the church of Christ. "*A little leaven leaveth the whole lump.*" Leaders must lead in keeping the church pure or else the church will become a reproach to the name of the Savior.

Followship

There must be a strong followship. Successful leadership depends on a loyal followship. Leaders cannot do their job unless there is the cooperation and willingness on the part of those they lead. Thankfully, most brethren realize their duty to the leaders and to God and do follow. The problem often encountered is a rebellious few who will disrupt whatever they can unless everything goes their way.

Another hindrance in good followship is that not all will allow themselves to get involved in the work. The leadership too often has to depend upon the "faithful few." The "spectator complex" has possessed too many. They had rather watch than work. We need to ask, "What kind of church would this church be if every member were just like me?" Nobody can build a strong home base on local members who do not see their personal responsibility and get involved in a submissive and cooperative manner.

Loyal followship includes faithfulness in attendance to the assemblies. It includes liberal giving and obedience to the authority entrusted to the eldership (Hebrews 13:17). God has given the eldership the duty to oversee the flock, expedite the work of the local church, maintain the truth and uphold the purity of the body. He has given them the necessary authority to conduct the work assigned them. Those that follow must be willing workers with them

There are many matters of human judgment that must be determined in the affairs of a local church. The eldership has the right and duty to make such decisions and a good followship will abide by them. No church can be a strong home base if the truth is not upheld, nor can a local church be strong unless there is respect for the decisions in matters of judgment that are made by the eldership.

Love

A strong home base will be noted for the love that exists among its members for one another. Paul wrote, "*Let all your things be done with charity.*" (First Corinthians 16:14). The American Standard Versions says, "*love.*" Love, being the strongest and most noble of emotions and motives of the heart, will cause brethren to seek what is good for one another. It will prohibit one from doing that which is detrimental and harmful toward his brethren.

Whether to love or not love is not an optional matter. We either learn to love as God taught or we cannot live in obedience to His will. But we must be cautious and not let ourselves think that love is to be equated with the soft, sweet, mushy, permissive nothingness that some want regarding the truth. Some have wrongfully concluded that to object to error or exclude what God has excluded while requiring what God requires is being too strict, harsh and lacking in love. It has been our experience that those who want this kind of so-called "love" are those who are the quickest and most willing to destroy those who are determined to stand for the truth. Actually, there is no way to genuinely love separate from standing for the truth.

Where love truly exists, cooperation, fellowship, brotherhood, courtesy, consideration and unity will naturally follow. This is true because those who love one another love the truth above all else. The tie that binds our hearts in Christian love is our loyalty to the Lord's Word.

Have you ever known of a congregation where these qualities existed that failed in its performance? Have you ever known one to truly succeed where these qualities were not noticeably present?

* * * * *

Ready for the Meeting

Paul wrote, "*But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing.*" (Galatians 4:18). Congregations often involve themselves in what is called a gospel meeting. Gospel meetings have proved to be a profitable method of getting the Word of truth to others, both the lost and the saved. A gospel meeting is certainly a good thing and when the church to which we belong conducts such an effort we ought to be zealously affected in it.

Paul gave this instruction in the context where he presented the relationship between the law God gave through Moses and the new covenant He gave through

Jesus Christ. There had been teachers among the brethren who were drawing disciples away, taking them back into the ways of Judaism. They were being zealous in recruiting brethren into apostasy. Paul wrote how good it is to be zealous in what is good, but what was taking place was not good. He wrote to stem the flow of digression from the truth. He did this by reminding them of their attitude toward him and his teaching in times past.

In verse eighteen Paul states an abiding principle of Christianity. We can make numerous applications of this principle and we wish to now apply it to being zealous in the conduct of a gospel meeting. This pertains to each one.

Jesus said in Mark 16:15, *“Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”* Matthew 28:19, *“Go ye therefore and teach all nations.”* We dare not take this duty lightly. A gospel meeting is one effort to carry out this commission given first to the apostles and through them to us. It is an effort to reach the lost with the truth, recover those who may have fallen, and strengthen the saved.

Are They Relics?

Some would have us believe that the day of the gospel meeting is over. In times past there were tremendous numerical and spiritual successes enjoyed in gospel meetings not often seen today. Many congregations had preaching only once per month and maybe less often. Today, many churches that conduct gospel meetings have good sermons preached to them nearly every week, several times during the week. This may account for what some might consider a slackened interest in gospel meetings. If so, it ought not be so. If a gospel meeting is not a success the fault lies not in the method but most likely in the members and their failure to be ready for it and support it. This is a failure that could and ought be corrected. It is true that not very much is accomplished when members of the local church reflect an attitude of indifference and disinterest toward what is being done. But more than likely the failure or success, to whatever degree, is determined before the meeting ever begins. It depends on proper preparation for it.

Is Truth Preached?

A gospel meeting is successful whenever the truth is preached. It cannot be successful without the truth. Huge numbers might attend but without the truth it is a Satanic victory. It is more beneficial when more people hear the truth, when members bring their lost friends and relatives to hear what God has declared through His Word. Without the gospel there can be no salvation because the gospel is God's power unto salvation (Romans 1:16). The more people present the more soil into which the seed can fall, germinate and take root.

Whose Responsibility?

What follows may sound overly critical and it is critical of brethren, but not unjustly or unkindly done. Some must think that the church runs by itself without anybody doing anything. It would not "run" at all if left to many who call themselves church members. They do not do much of anything, anytime, to see that the church succeeds in its God-given assignments. They feel no sense of responsibility to God or their brethren. They will not ever try to be present at most of the services during the gospel meeting. It has been my observation that one half to two thirds of the members of a local church will be absent during the services of a gospel meeting. But somehow, such people think this does not have any detrimental effect on the efforts put forth. What it shows is how little many members care about the lost, or, for that matter, about God and His work. These "drones" do more harm than good to the cause of Christ. If you asked them, "Do you want the church to shut down?" they would probably say, "No." But their actions say, "Yes." How can anybody expect the sinful world to be impressed with the importance of the truth when so many members are working on the side of the devil to dampen and hinder the efforts to save the lost by preaching the Word?

Brethren Can Even Be Rude

A gospel meeting is not for the benefit of the visiting preacher. It is not, however, considered good manners or being polite to invite a preacher to a gospel meeting and then members not cooperate and work for it. That is just a lack of courtesy and is plain rude. But many brothers and

sisters have no qualms about being rude in this matter, The visiting preacher takes time from his work, much of which he has to get done anyway by doubling his efforts. He leaves his family, spends extra hours of study and preparation for the gospel meeting, delivers his lessons. Often he spends considerable funds coming and going and not always is properly supported financially for his work. He does the best that he can and has to endure the humiliation that the very local brethren who invited him to come will not even hold up his hands, being absent, not bringing others to hear the truth he is called upon to present. A congregation ought to mean business in a gospel meeting, or not have one. To have a gospel meeting just to be having something going on is not a very highly motivated effort. It then becomes nothing much more than a conscience soothing effort for lukewarm and half-hearted so-called Christians.

Put it in Our Plans

Let us change the tone somewhat. Let us offer some constructive suggestions, mostly to individuals, and indirectly to each one. The best thing one can do when a gospel meeting is planned is for each member to plan to be among those who will be present at every service. Something might prevent perfect attendance, but we should plan to be present every service. Some never intend to come at all, and others think once, maybe twice, including Sunday morning, is enough. Everyone should plan to have perfect attendance. If not, why not? You expect the visiting preacher, the local preacher, the elders, etc. to be present. You should come just as much as they, not just if it is convenient with other plans. Make it convenient. Feel responsible, because you are. Set those dates aside for God's work. Gear your activities to accommodate the meeting rather than squeezing in a service or two provided other things do not interfere. It is a matter of priority that we should establish. What comes first with you? Where does God fit in your life and activities?

Invite

Make a list of those you can bring or at least invite to come. Specify which friends, neighbors, relatives you intend to personally contact. Those people need you and

need what is to be heard. Do them a favor and give them your consideration. Very likely you will be the only contact with truth they have. Do not forsake them. Let them know you care for their souls.

Talk It Up

Start immediately once the announcement is made about the meeting to talk enthusiastically and optimistically about the meeting and what can be done during that period. It reflects an attitude the way people talk. It builds a good attitude if they talk properly. Do your part in creating a positive and uplifting attitude among everybody about it. Do not just assume everyone knows it will be a good thing. Be a booster of good works. Make it your aim to be sure that this attitude spreads. Be zealous in a good thing. This is some of the best advertising than can be done.

Special Efforts

The congregation might have a special concerted effort for a larger attendance at Bible study for the first Sunday of the meeting. This automatically presents potential new prospects for teaching. It shows an attitude of interest in people and the desire for their welfare. We want numbers, not just to have numbers, but because each number represents a precious soul that must be saved.

Do We Sing the Truth?

We need to work in every way we can for the gospel meeting so when the time comes and we sing, "Rescue the perishing, care for the dying," we will have tried to do just that. We will not feel like hypocrites when we sing, "I want to be a worker for the Lord." How can we sing, "Seeking the Lost," if we have not sought the lost? Can we honestly sing, "We'll Work 'Till Jesus Comes," if we won't work? Brethren, these things matter to God.

Paul said be zealous in a good thing, and the gospel meeting is certainly a good thing. Who will obey this apostolic instruction the next time there is a gospel meeting where you regularly attend? How about you?

* * * * *

Joseph, Like Christ

It has been noted that possibly the most Christ-like character of the Old Testament was Joseph. He suffered so much from the hands of his own people, but when it became apparent that God was using him for the preservation of the family he never held a grudge nor sought vengeance, but rather demonstrated a forgiving spirit that can only be likened to Christ. Why do we burden ourselves with hatred and desire for revenge? Who is hurt most by holding grudges? What a generous contribution we can make to peace among men if we could only look with consideration and forgiveness toward those who despitefully use us and abuse us. It may not be the easiest thing to do but we will be the winner and better for it. JB



JAMES W. BOYD

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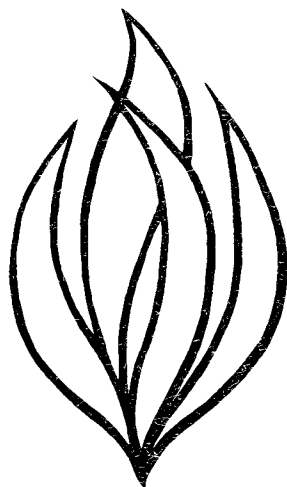
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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).



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Paul in Athens

Number One

Faith in God and confidence in the Bible as the Word of God is under constant attack and ridicule. Many have fallen beneath the power and influence of skeptics and their irreligious persuasions dedicated to the overthrow and destruction of the faith of Christ. One prime source from which this skepticism pours is the collegiate, university centers dominated by an intellectual community, rationalistic professors and materialists whose efforts are to "free" mankind from what they call "superstition" and religion. Their efforts have met with success among many uninformed and inexperienced youths who sit in their classes.

Many youths go to college with faith and return from college in doubt, confusion and frustration, having been subjected to atheistic, communistic, socialistic, humanistic philosophies that are designed to crush faith. Since society places such a premium on higher education and has raised the high-degreed instructor to the undeserved pedestal of "expert" in everything, these "down-with God" people have given rise to an unprecedented instability and confusion for many. Rather than educating the young, they are determined to indoctrinate the young with the doctrines of disbelief and humanism.

We have confidence that the facts of history, science and the truth in every realm are on the side of true New Testament Christianity. Only the unproven theories and philosophies of "smarter-than-God" men contradict the Bible. But people are selling their souls cheaply, forfeiting their holy privilege of thinking, and rather yielding their minds too willingly, deserting the sacred convictions too easily, partaking of the paralyzing, pessimistic

inadequacies served by the liberal theologians and so-called scholars of our time.

Many Are Misinformed

One reason some have not embraced Christianity, or have forsaken it, is because they are so misinformed and ill-informed. It is not because of the facts, or because it is unreasonable to follow Christ. But in their young and impressionable state, while seeking an "education," they are subjected to the theories of the "scholars." Christianity as revealed in Scripture has been so distorted by both Protestants and Catholics, that the unbelievers have been able to misrepresent true Christianity with impunity.

This danger of the agnostic, infidel and atheistic professor has been minimized by many parents and church leaders. The very ones God has charged for the proper training of the young are naive, indifferent, complacent and often compromising toward this onslaught against faith. There is no more fertile field for the advance of atheism than in the area of "education."

Many of us know the agony of doubt during youth. Some fear what might be discovered that will undermine their faith. We have no need to fear such things. We do have the need to establish ourselves on the ever-stable and everlasting truth. How can we do this? By turning to the only source of authority, God's infallible, inerrant, authoritative, all-sufficient and inspired Word can we do this (Second Timothy 3:16,17). Our present series of lessons concentrates on Paul's sermon in Athens as recorded in Acts 17:16-34. Keep your Bible by your side as we study.

Athens and Her People

Let us be acquainted with Athens and the man, Paul. Athens was a city not dissimilar to our intellectual centers. It was a city of people with intellectual and artistic capacities. Yet, Athens failed to find truth, had no power for a higher ethical life, did not know God, and was a city that existed without hope of anything and unable to offer anything, certainly not hope.

Paul's message is in stark contrast with the confused and vague contradictions that dominated Athenian thinking. Athens was a city with great intellectual attainments, wisdom of men, scientific and philosophical notions. You might think one could rely on what came from Athens. But such was not true. Athens demonstrated the foolishness of relying on the wisdom of men and ignoring God. We lean on a broken reed to lean on "education" alone.

But let us praise Athens. Greek culture has stamped itself upon Western culture in almost every field of endeavor. Athenian art, philosophy, science, literature, ethics and politics have survived the ages until now in various degrees. It remains prominent in many realms of our modern world. In literature, scholars agree it is unsurpassed. In creative art, it has no peer. In architecture, what exceeds the monuments, temples and buildings of ancient Greece, particularly Athens? Sculpture, mathematics, astronomy, natural science, medicine have all enjoyed contributions from Athens. Greece produced Plato, Socrates and Aristotle. As the Roman system of government has molded much of Western law, Greece gave us much political theory of government, even democracy. Such concepts of justice, liberty, law and democracy, parliaments, public opinion, all have the Greeks as the original architects. Similar things could be noticed about their contributions to drama, inventions and history. We do not downgrade the intellectual capacity of Athens, nor dismiss its impact on mankind. Their thirst for knowledge was passionate and often even fanatical.

Their Religion

Most interesting was Greek religion. They had no well-defined rule of faith. It was a mass of contradictory fables, obscure in meaning. Religion varied from one period to another. It is hard to trace it. They had a god for almost every action, impulse, virtue, vice and whim. There was a god of violence, fear, revolution, sports, drunkenness, madness, persuasion, sleep hunger, etc. All were personified in some god. They even made an altar to "*the unknown god*" (Acts 17:23), lest they omit one somewhere.

They formulated no religious doctrines, no church, no creed, no preaching, even thought oratory was one of their notable practices. Their religion had little to no bearing whatever on their daily lives and moral conduct. The gods were even thought to be guilty of crimes, but there was no real conception or sense of sin. Their religion did not concern itself with conscience. Whereas the Puritan faith considered one's relationship to God as all-important, the Greeks considered such a relationship as completely unimportant, even non-existing. Nothing was religious truth, but "truth" was as one personally felt it himself. They failed to establish or determine any real final and objective truth.

They were as Paul described the city of Corinth, "*The world by wisdom knew not God.*" (First Corinthians 1:21). In all their knowledge they made themselves fools.

Their State of Mind

The result was unrest, fear, pessimism, hopelessness, despair and the expectant collapse that dominated Grecian culture of which Athens was a center post. It was into this intellectual city that the lonely figure of Paul, the apostle of Christ, came. No more staggering challenge ever faced man that this which faced this proclaimer of Christ. He was before intellectualism, human wisdom, self-sufficiency, pride, haughtiness and humanity as its "wisest." But they were without God.

Paul

Let us take a moment to see Paul. There is such a vast difference in men. Now and then there comes forth the exceptional person who is able to influence the thinking of almost the entire world. Of those who have lived since Christ, Paul has proven to be the most influential. This is not because of himself, but because of the message he preached. First Corinthians 2:2, "*For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*" Galatians 1:11,12, "*But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.*"

Paul traveled extensively by foot and boat in order to preach Christ and stir up the hearts of people and produce convictions. He upset the strongholds of error and sought to deliver man from the darkness of sin. It was said of him, and those with him, that he turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6). Not only did he influence by preaching, but also by writing as the Spirit led him to write. Nearly twenty centuries have not exhausted the wealth of wisdom of his inspired words. Thirteen, possibly fourteen, books of the New Testament were penned by Paul

Paul was always a man of exceptional zeal, religious fervor, faith and conscience. A Roman citizen and a Jew by blood and religion, he was converted to Christ. This man, once a persecutor of Christ, became a preacher of Christ. He was highly trained scholastically, having studied at the feet of the renowned Jewish rabbi named Gamaliel. Seeing the Lord on the road to Damascus, being told to enter the city and there he would be told what to do, he did as instructed. From the time of his conversion he preached Christ as the Redeemer of man from sin. If ever there was a giant among Christians, it was Paul. He is the man who delivered the sermon on Mars Hill in Athens.

A Proven Vessel

By this time in his life Paul had already suffered much for the cause of Christ. He had been stoned, beaten, threatened, jailed, harassed and more hardships were to come. Verse sixteen reveals something to expect when Paul encounters the intellectuals of Athens. *"Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry."* Paul was stirred, indeed, provoked to righteous anger as well as pity. The multitude of idols, gods and altars stimulated, motivated and irritated him. His learning as a Jew had taught him to loathe idolatry. His love for mankind caused him to be vitally concerned for Athens. His determination that truth be heard would not allow him to stand idle. He knew the truth and his heart was smitten that there, in the world's greatest center of learning, the most foolish thing that men could create and practice dominated the scene.

Paul began the work he came to accomplish; namely, preach Christ. *"Therefore he disputed in the synagogue with*

the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him." (Acts 17:17). As was his custom, he began in the Jewish synagogue where he could find people with some common ground with him. But he went beyond the synagogue into the market places, meeting the Athenians on their own home ground, disputing with idolaters, pagans anyone and everyone with whom he could converse. He made his points with clarity, preaching Christ and salvation. It was not very long before he attracted the attention of the philosophers of various sorts. *"Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection."* (Acts 17:18).

It was this encounter that led to his opportunity to preach at Mars Hill, the great gathering place of the rulers, thinkers and intellectuals of the city in that day. There he had opportunity to proclaim the truth of God before a skeptical and scholarly crowd.

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Paul in Athens

Number Two

Our study continues with emphasis on Acts 17:18-21. The philosophy of the Epicureans was to make pleasure the end of all existence. They believed gods were for the purpose of reaching satisfaction of every whim and desire. They denied that there is a life after this one, so they concluded, "Eat, drink, be merry, for tomorrow we die." Their attitude was that there is no real purpose in life except to be happy, enjoy pleasure and satisfy oneself. It is not difficult to imagine the impact of such thinking on the morals and daily lives of the population, especially with those who followed this standard, or lack of one.

This philosophy continues until now. It is the theme of atheism and humanism and explains much of the sordid and immoral conduct of those who have thought that life is for nothing except to "do your

own thing.” With no God, no rules, no standards, no accountability, what is there to restrict anything anyone might wish to do?

The Stoics were quite different. They were stern, emotionless, intellectual, extreme in asceticism or self-denial. Pleasure was not the prime purpose of life for them, and even pleasure did not come from satisfying your desires, but by suppressing them until there was nothing you wanted. This extreme view led to the renunciation of necessities of life and withdrawal from reality. To them life was only to be lived so one could die. Such pessimism, uselessness and lack of purpose one could hardly imagine!

Point of Common Interest

In Paul and his message they found something of common concern, however, and both wondered and puzzled over his teaching. *“What will this babbler say?”* Paul set forth strange gods to them because he preached Christ and His resurrection. They took Paul to the Areopagus, the place of their high court and hall of discussion on Mars Hill. They appeared to have interest in his message, but their interest was not what one would have hoped. Their motive was simply a yearning to hear something they had not heard previously. They were in pursuit of whatever was new, dazzling, exciting, sensational and different. They idolized knowledge, wanting to know in order to know. They had no intention of responding to what Paul taught.

They were like some today who always talk of a new outlook on life, the need of a new religion, a new code of conduct, a new approach to everything. They act as if they are more interested in the “new” than the “true.” As you listen to them you are soon impressed that they think nothing of importance ever happened until they came upon the scene of life and whatever might have happened was insignificant unless they thought of it. Pride, arrogance, sophistication and haughtiness characterizes such people and their philosophies.

Such were the men of Athens. *“For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or hear some new thing.”* (Acts 17:21). Living in a far-out, ivory tower of unrealism, they were impractical, pessimistic, pleasure crazed, but well-informed as to what people were thinking even though

abounding in frustration, confusion, instability and hopelessness. Actually, they were not much use to anybody and certainly producing nothing of eternal good.

The Prime Themes

Paul's sermon noted three dominant themes: (1) the nature of God and the creation of the world; (2) the resurrection of Christ, the Son of God; (3) the coming judgment for all men. What many then and now might consider irrelevant, especially to the all-knowing intellectual, constituted the major emphasis of the preaching of truth. Even though Paul answered questions nobody was asking, he answered questions that everybody ought to be asking.

Paul began with reference to an altar he had seen with the inscription, "*To the unknown god.*" (Acts 17:22,23). The city was religious, having many gods. It is ironic that they professed so much knowledge, yet they accepted a god about which they knew nothing. Paul used that as his entrance, saying that he would tell them about God of whom they were ignorant. This got their attention.

The True God

What did Paul affirm about God? Concentrating on verses twenty-four through thirty, we hear Paul say that God made the world and all things therein. Both the Old and New Testaments assert that God created the world out of nothing, ordered it, shaped it, fashioned it, by the sheer power of His Word, voluntarily, speaking and bringing it into existence. At the first it was a shapeless mass, but He arranged it as He saw fit. The origin of the world is God.

This necessarily contends for God's existence before the world's existence. God is eternal in nature while the earth is created and temporal. It had a beginning. Material did not exist before mind. Mind brought matter into existence. God existed without the world, but the world could not exist without God for He created it.

Paul's statement also affirms that God is spiritual, not physical as the world He made. He is not like gold, silver, stone or like the idols of Athens. He is present everywhere, not far from any one of us. He does not dwell in man-

made temples like a physical being. Paul taught that he did not worship a god that he had made, but the God that had made him.

Furthermore, God is the giver of life and man is God's offspring. Man would not have life except it was given to him by God. From one man came all peoples. God placed man in his habitation, his place to live, this earth, and man is sustained by God. It is "*in him we live, and move, and have our being.*" (verse 28).

More of His Nature

The inescapable implications of this is that God is all-powerful, all-knowing and ever-present, the Lord and Master of all things. It is not possible that we fully comprehend God or His creation. To do so we would have to be on an equality with God. We cannot know how God has done what He has done except through His Word. But while we are limited and finite and He is infinite, we must not restrict God and His capacities to the limit of our understanding and abilities. The nature of God surpasses our own or else we would be as God.

Even though there is much concerning Deity we cannot know or explain, the Biblical explanation and account of God, the creation, the world, the nature of all things, is the easiest of all explanations to accept because it is reasonable, logical, scientifically accurate and harmonious with all known truth. It is a mistake to think that science and the Bible are opposed to each other. Men's theories and philosophies often contradict the Bible, and misinterpretations of the Bible contradict some science, but there is harmony between God's world and God's Word.

Limitations of Science

Science, a study of this world and its material nature, cannot tell us about the origin of the world. Explaining origins is beyond the ability of science which deals with what is here and that which can be tested, measured and proved by empirical methods. None can test the origin of the world in a laboratory. We must rely on revelation.

Many theories have poured from the minds of men regarding origins that contradict Scripture. But these theories will also contradict what can be proved through science. They are ever-changing, being modified, shifting to accommodate later discoveries. They exist without proof and scientific demonstration. Philosophies have been devised based on certain facts, but arbitrarily compiled to formulate hypotheses and explanations that remain unproved, unsupported and imaginative guesses.

On the other hand, the known and provable facts remain on the side of the Biblical account. Earth had to have a beginning and science has proved that. Matter is not eternal and science proved that. The Bible has taught both facts long before science demonstrated it. The world had to have a first cause, and the Bible designates God as that Cause. Effect has to have a cause. God is the Cause and the world is the effect.

If we reason together, we know even though the world came from nothing material it came from something. That something is God. From nothing, God created the world. The orderliness, precision and design of the operations of nature demands an orderer and designer. It is unreasonable to think this vast and intricate universe "just happened accidentally."

What Genesis Teaches

The Genesis record affirms the primacy of water, light before the sun, land before life, the fixity of the "kinds" of animals, animals before human, and the cessation of creative activity. Scientific data has been accumulated through the years that is harmonious with each affirmation. Just how could an ancient writer like Moses or Job have known with such accuracy these facts except God revealed them to him?

Even though the Bible is not intended to be a scientific book, but rather God's revelation concerning salvation for man and man's relationship with God, yet, it is scientifically accurate when it speaks of scientific matters. We are not surprised that the work and Word of God harmonize. There are numerous examples of the consistency between the Bible and science on detailed

matters that is not adequately explained without God. Scientists have no knowledge that can destroy any Biblical truth and revelation. Nor is there real substance to the alleged contradictions within the Bible .

Conclusion

What is the conclusion and consequence of Paul's teaching concerning God? (1) God is. (2) God is the Creator and Sustainer of all. (3) God is eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present Spirit, the source of life. In view of this, Paul taught man is accountable to God and must repent (verse 30), turning from idols to the true and living God. This demands faith based on evidence God has provided. God does not ask that we take a "leap in the dark." He gives evidence to verify His Word.

We, like Paul, say to the intellectual skeptic that there is the God of heaven and that even the heavens declare the glory of God. The Bible begins, "*In the beginning God...*" Once that is accepted, the rest of the Bible is easily accepted. So Paul taught and so we also believe.

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Paul in Athens

Number Three

Another theme of Paul was the resurrection of Christ. This had been a prominent part of his preaching since he had seen the risen Lord as recorded in Acts nine. First Corinthians fifteen is considered the resurrection chapter where Paul stressed the reality of this event regarding Christ and eventually all of us.

Of the three dominant themes at Athens only the resurrection belongs to the realm of history. The creation was pre-historic, in that it occurred before man was on the earth. The judgment is yet in the future. But the resurrection is presented in Scripture as a historical event

just as Jesus was a historical character. We know He lived, where He live, what He did, and know many of the characters of His day from other sources than the New Testament. Just as the Bible is not intended to be a science book but is scientifically reliable when it speaks of such thing, neither is the Bible primarily a history book, but when it speaks of historical matters it speaks accurately.

Christ in History

The encyclopedias record the fact of Christ and we use the designations B.C. and A.D. that testify of His birth. But not only did He live, He died. We know more details of the hours prior to His death than we know of any other person of ancient history. We know more about His last week of life from the New Testament than we know of all the rest of His life combined. We know of the six trials (three before Jews and three before Romans), what was said to Him, what He said in the few times He spoke, how He was treated, even some details of arranging for false witnesses against Him and their perjured testimony. We even know the name of the man who carried His cross to Calvary, and the statements the Lord made while on the cross. When we speak of the death of Christ we are not talking about a myth or fable as some skeptics would have us believe, but historical data about a real person.

The Resurrection of Christ

Something happened to the body of Jesus. What was it? The New Testament says He was taken from the cross by Joseph of Arimathaea, placed in a new and borrowed tomb in a garden near the place of crucifixion. It also records that three days later the tomb was empty. We contend the historical records of the New Testament are reliable and we have no reason to doubt them.

A resurrection means a rising from the dead, coming forth from the dead, a return to the state of the living from the state of the dead. There can be no resurrection without a death. What died? The soul does not die as does the body. Jesus had said, "*Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*" His body died, but not His spirit. Ecclesiastes 12:7 teaches that the body and spirit separate at death, as does James 2:26. If Christ conquered death at all, His body had

to be delivered from death's power. His was a bodily resurrection. To speak of the resurrection of Christ as being anything other than a literal, bodily and actual resurrection is to misrepresent what the Bible declares and is to deny the resurrection of Christ altogether.

The resurrection of Christ is crucial to New Testament Christianity. On the truthfulness of the resurrection hangs the credibility of the gospel, the church, the integrity of Jesus and His real identity. If He did not come forth from the dead, He is a false prophet because He foretold that He would rise again the third day (Matthew 16:21).

The resurrection of Christ is an essential part of the revelation of Christ to the world. It is at the heart of the gospel (First Corinthians 15:1-8). It is the Biblical explanation of God's plan for saving man, the fulfillment of prophecy, an event witnessed by the apostles, and even as many as five hundred people at once saw the resurrected Lord. His resurrection is a declaration that He is the Son of God (Romans 1:4). It is not the only evidence of that truth, but without it the other evidences would stand in contradiction. Paul wrote, *"If Christ hath not been raised from the dead, then our preaching is vain."* (First Corinthians 15:14-19). If no resurrection, there would be no church because the church is founded on the truth that Jesus is the Son of God, which was proved by His resurrection. If you take the resurrection out of the gospel message you have removed that which makes the New Testament coherent. The New Testament does not simply say to follow this great leader, but teaches that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who was proved to be who He claimed to be by His resurrection from the dead.

Burial

As for the burial of Christ, all we know about it is what the New Testament records. Keep in mind the status of reliability of the New Testament writers in other historical matters. We know who took His body from the cross, who wrapped it with spices in burial clothes, and even where it was laid; namely, a tomb near the scene of the crucifixion in a nearby garden. There is no evidence from any source to contradict any fact of His burial as is recorded in the Bible. We know of none who seriously challenge the

record of His burial. There are two primary testimonies that cry out that Jesus rose from the dead.

The Empty Tomb

First, there is the empty tomb. An empty tomb alone does not prove Jesus rose from the dead. But if the resurrection is true, the tomb must be empty, and it was empty. Women saw it was empty along with Peter and John. Even guards reported it was empty. The enemies of the Lord never denied the emptiness of the tomb.

Some have offered other explanations for the emptiness on the basis that the resurrection is unreasonable and unacceptable to them. They cite the report of the guard, saying, "*Say ye, his disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept*" (Matthew 28:13). As one can see, this is what the guards were told to say, not what they saw. But is this testimony itself reasonable? Did all the guards sleep at once, and at the very hour the body was supposed to have been stolen? They were on duty and to sleep was punishable by death. Are we to think all would ignore this?

Furthermore, if all were asleep, how could any of them testify what actually happened? Can you be a reliable witness to what happens when you are asleep? Such "testimony" could be nothing more than speculation, not eye-witness information.

How could the disciples steal the body without arousing some of the guards? Why would they want to steal it anyway? Their hope was founded on the assurance that Jesus would come forth. If He would not rise their own hope would be dashed. Would they hold to such a hope even though they knew it was unfounded, and even risk their lives and suffer persecutions for teaching what they knew was false? Is that a reasonable conclusion? Surely, we have no problem dismissing what the guards said.

"Explanations"

Some contend that Joseph took the body to another tomb. But there is no evidence for that. Why would he risk his life for a meaningless deception? Remember that soldiers were sent to seal the tomb, not Joseph. They would have known

if a body was there or not. To have sealed an empty tomb would have been to jeopardize their lives.

Others say the women went to the wrong tomb. But is it likely that all the women, plus Peter and John, went to the wrong tomb? Was the angel who spoke to them mistaken also? Why did not the enemies of Jesus produce the body from the "right" tomb when the claim was made for the resurrection and explode the whole contention?

Others have said that Jesus did not die, but only swooned on the cross into unconsciousness and later revived by friends and went on with the plot to deceive. But the record says that blood and water came from His body, indicative of death. Guards noted He was already dead when they broke the legs of the others, but not His. Could one survive three days in a tomb having suffered what He did? Could He have removed the stone, overpowered the guards and escaped in such a physical state? Absolutely not!

These things are mentioned because they are offered by the intellectual skeptic who says the resurrection is unreasonable. But such "explanations" only show how unreasonable are the skeptics. The fact of the empty tomb stands as evidence against the denials of skeptics.

He Was Seen

The second major evidence of His resurrection is the number of personal and physical appearances of Jesus. At least twelve times, in different places, before different people, as many as five hundred at once, Jesus came unexpectedly, eating, drinking, walking, talking, being heard, touched and seen. While skeptics cry, "Mistaken identity," we contend that those closet to Him would not have mistaken Him. They were in His immediate presence. Is it likely that five hundred would be simultaneously deceived? Keep in mind that those who saw Him had doubted what they had heard about His resurrection and did not expect to see Him. Yet, they did. The necessary psychological conditions for mass deception were simply not in existence.

The Conclusion

The only logical and reasonable conclusion that can be drawn from the evidence, in spite of suggested alternatives, is that the grave of Jesus was also the birthplace of the indestructible conviction that Jesus conquered death and come forth from the grave. When He did, prophecy was fulfilled and the Sonship of Jesus was confirmed. Our faith and hope continues to rest on the validity of this event, and it stand even beneath the vicious blows of unbelievers down through the ages.

The resurrection was the second major theme of Paul's sermon on Mars Hill, and we preach the same truth today to an unbelieving and skeptical world so influenced by the so-called "wise men" intellectuals who deny whatever they either have not done or do not understand.

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Paul in Athens

Number Four

When Paul preached in Athens at Mars Hill he stressed the basic matters of Christianity to an unbelieving, self-sufficient, worldly-wise, intellectual community. Even though some mocked and ridiculed his message, Paul was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ before these self-acclaimed experts whose "wisdom" had become their vice as well as their virtue. They were very much like some that Paul described in Second Timothy 3:7, *"Ever learning, and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth."*

Paul preached Christ, His life, death, burial and resurrection. He had begun His sermon by explaining to them the true and living God, the Creator of all thing. Finally he turned His attention to the inescapable coming judgment of all mankind. Our text is Acts 17:30,31.

"And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given

assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

Coming Judgment

In Athens, as in other localities, Paul preached that there was a great day coming, definite in the future, that would involve all men, at which time entrance would be made into an eternal destiny. Even though such preaching was new to Grecian religious thought, a final judgment is a very reasonable expectation. The fact that some cry, "I have never heard of anything like that," does not alter the facts. It is not necessary for man to understand every reason for every action of God before he should accept it. But the judgment is reasonable and understandable. Judgment is commonplace in the affairs of men.

It is inescapable that we make many judgments every day. In courts, before judges, in daily experiences, weighing evidence and measuring by standards are everyday happenings. Why should people doubt that there will be an accounting before God since there is an accounting being given before one another all the time? If the mundane matters of life have sufficient significance to warrant the exercise of judgment, certainly that which concerns the existence of man, his world, life, spirit, spiritual and eternal matters warrant the making of judgments.

Biblical history reveals how God has made many judgments of people, events, angels, nations, cities, etc. With this record before us, why should anyone really question that there will be a final judgment?

The Standard

Paul's remark about the judgment infers another major truth. It insists the existence of a standard by which people should live. It demands that there is right and wrong. There is that which is acceptable to God and that which is unacceptable. Furthermore, it contends that justice shall prevail, eternity is real, and immorality is true, or else why a judgment at all? The final judgment to come dismisses the atheistic, materialistic, humanistic doctrines that there is no God, no standard, no right or wrong, everything relative, and no life after this.

Not only does the daily necessity of judgment, the meaning of life, and God's other judgments sustain the reasonableness of a final judgment, but morality demands it. Have there not been many injustices perpetrated through the ages that have not been properly punished or even challenged? What of the unconfessed murders, thefts, unsolved crimes, lies and various sorts of unpunished blasphemies and sins for which the guilty have not repented? Is all this nothing? Does it not matter? Does not morality and justice demand that such things be accounted? Any realistic mind knows many deeds of goodness and nobility go unrewarded here. If good and evil are to be treated alike, wherein is there justice and morality at all? Again, we insist that the reality of a judgment where all is measured and the fruits are reaped is not only reasonable, but unreasonable not to expect it.

The Judge

But who has the right to render judgment on all mankind? No mere human could ever qualify because it demands infinite power, knowledge, agelessness, understanding, a capacity for total and infallible justice, and the power to extend mercy to whatever degree might be given. Only Deity could qualify as Judge. Only the Creator, Sustainer, the giver of life, One eternal in nature, all-knowing, all-wise, all-seeing, ever-present could render the judgment the world must receive.

Genesis 18:25 affirms God, the Judge of all, shall do right. Romans 2:16 teaches that God shall judge even the secrets of men. Such matters are those that only Deity could know.

God, in His Word, has declared many of His judgments, and that His judgments shall be administered through His Son. It will be by "*the man whom he hath ordained*" that judgment shall be rendered. That man is Christ. John 5:22,23,27, "*For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him... And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man.*" Second Timothy 4:1,8, "*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... Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." God is the Judge but His judgment is through His Son, Jesus Christ.

There are many questions pertaining to the judgment for which we have no Biblical and authoritative answer. For some questions we are provided limited and partial answers. Some are completely answered for us.

Those to be Judged

Who will be included in this final coming judgment? John 5:28,29 shows all shall be included. This is why the gospel is to be preached to all. Second Corinthians 5:10, *"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad."*

When will this judgment take place? We know neither the day nor hour (Matthew 24:36-39). But our lack of knowledge of when in no way invalidates its certainty. Scoffers will come denying it shall occur (Second Peter 3:3,4,7,10), but *"the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night."* His coming will be unannounced as far as the exact time, but God has already announced the certainty of that day.

What shall be judged? What shall be weighed and measured? Ecclesiastes 12:14, *"For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."* We shall be judged according to our works (Revelation 20:13). Therefore everything about life here on earth has significance.

What will be the criteria, standard and measure the Lord shall use? John 12:48, The word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." Those who believe not (John 3:18), obey not (Second Thessalonians 1:7-10), who have lived wickedly (Revelation 21:8) shall be judged.

Paul said the judgment will be *"in righteousness."* (Acts 17:31), which is defined in Psalm 119:172 as the

commandments of God. The Lord's perfect law of liberty will be that by which we shall be judged.

And Then...

Matthew twenty-five pictures the judgment scene as a separation of the saved from the lost. This judgment will be the sentencing of each one into an eternity of heaven or hell. The decision regarding our eternity will have been made by each one in this life. It is our choice.

All this strikes us with awe, even fear. But for those who serve the Lord faithfully in Christ, it will be a day of rejoicing. Let none of us by-pass salvation.

Some treated Paul's sermon with scorn, dismissing it as nothing. Few were touched by it. This intellectual center was less attuned to truth than most any other place Paul preached. Truth was not well received, but it still is the truth. Some people are just too steeped in their own "wisdom" to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ.

"After these things, Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth." (Acts 18:1)

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The Command, Order and Promise

Matthew 6:24-34, *"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. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body more than raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field which today is and*

tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought saying, What shall we eat, or, what shall we drink, or withal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

This passage is a portion of what has been called the preamble to the Christian faith, the Sermon on the Mount. We will concentrate on the thirty-third verse, "*But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.*" Our lesson provides us a sense and level of values, helping us gain and retain those things with which we are concerned daily. The passage consists of a command, an order or priority, and a promise. It discerns the relative value between the spiritual and the material.

The Command

The command is to "*seek.*" We are told to seek God's kingdom and God's righteousness. This demands a deliberate choice of action and effort on our part, a deliberate searching, striving after through sacrifice, putting forth special effort with the sincere intent to find. It calls for looking and pursuing for something of great value. Finding what is sought is not coincidental or accidental, but intentional. People may sometimes just run across something of value and find a bargain, a treasure, without exerting much special effort. But we are commanded to seek out something with a craving for it.

That which is to be sought is God's kingdom, which is His church. Colossians 1:13, Paul tells those in the church that they are in the kingdom. As one preacher illustrated, "The church is to the kingdom the same thing an automobile is to a car." Therefore, all things pertaining to the church must be the object of our fervent search. This teaching magnifies the greatness of His church and forever banishes the idea that the church is something optional.

We are to seek God's righteousness, which Psalm 119:172 defines as the commandments of God. Righteousness is right doing as God has commanded it. As expressed in Matthew 5:6, we are to hunger and thirst for it, recognizing the need of it, desiring to know what God says in order to do what God directs. The attitude is, "*Not my will but thine be done.*" Here is man's prime goal and purpose in life. This is his most noble function, that of hearing and heeding the will of the Lord.

Order

The seeking of the kingdom and righteousness is of the first order. While we are involved in many matters of life, nothing is to occupy the place of first priority above this seeking. This is easily understood though not so easily obeyed. First means first, foremost in rank and importance. Who can mistake what is taught? Nothing else can occupy or share first place with it (Matthew 6:24).

What does this teaching tell us in circumstances of conflict between the interest of the church and other interests of life? Will we heed what is taught? It means the church before self, social activity, business, pleasure or whatever. Some might wish to dismiss this as "preacher talk" but you just remember the preacher that taught it.

There are times when Satan tempts us to forget to put first things first, whether it be material or personal matters. But can we afford to omit or neglect to follow God's order?

Promise

Consider the promise that is made when this teaching is obeyed. "*All these things*" refers to the material necessities which Jesus had mentioned. Man gets so concerned about his physical welfare that he can be led to neglect his spiritual welfare. Some act as if they think God does not understand that we have physical needs. But Jesus said, "*Your heavenly Father knoweth you have need of these things.*" Is it not strange how we worry and fret, striving for the earthly things, having no assurance of success, but Jesus promises success, as God sees what is best for us, provided we put first things first? He does not promise all we might want, or think we need, but He does promise

what we really need. But the promise is a conditional one. We must obey the command and keep matters in proper order.

Something more wonderful than this promise is not stated in this passage. Material provisions are secondary to spiritual blessings. Having what we need materially is like a by-product that follows the spiritual benefits of serving the Lord. Our greatest blessings are those pertaining to the soul through Christ. These are also ours when we seek God's kingdom and His righteousness first.

What price can be placed on forgiveness of sins which would otherwise prevent us from entering heaven? How do you value fellowship with Deity, hope, love, and understanding the eternal meaning and purpose of life? After all these things even while we live on earth, we have heaven to which we can look forward.

The lesson is brief but not difficult to grasp. But who will truly believe it and demonstrate that conviction by deeds? What are your values in life? Are they as God has evaluated them? What are you seeking during your brief span of life? Is it what God says should come first? How much do you consider the promises, both materially and spiritually, that God has made? Does your life reflect confidence in His Word?

To keep things in balance, we are not saying, nor did Jesus, that all material pursuits are evil. We do understand that life does not consist of the possessions we temporarily have on this earth (Luke 12:15). God knows what is essential to sustain life on earth. He has promised to provide if we would put first things first. So we encourage one and all, self and others, seek Him before and above all else, and all will be well with you.

* * * * *

Should We Not Say, “I told you so!”

It has been considered by some that saying, “I told you so,” is a bit rude. But it is not always the case. Sometimes it is a good way of impressing upon people how they were informed and warned and then they paid no attention to what they knew, went ahead anyway, and then had to suffer the consequences of their folly.

Brethren are now suffering from the invasion of modern versions (perversions) of the Bible even though they were repeatedly warned against such books of error.

We hear among some the doctrine of grace alone without any law, salvation by faith alone and you need not even know the correct reasons for baptism, women preachers and teachers in mixed assemblies, instrumental music, even partaking of the Lord’s Supper on Saturdays, and other such heresies. Such things are taught in various so-called modern versions of the Bible.

Some claimed, “The errors in these versions would not hurt us!” But when people follow the liberals and the “wise men” of our colleges and partake of error, it is not surprising that these errors are soon found among us.

So-called versions teach what would not be allowed in pulpits and classes. But now the errors are taught from pulpits and classes. Feed on error! Follow error!

Modern versions have contributed to the digression among churches of Christ and those who have tried to ignore or play down the impact of such perversions shall not stand guiltless before God or man for helping to cause it.

Many of us warned against them. Too few gave heed. Now we see and hear among churches that which could not have been imagined just a few years ago. But, “I told you so,” and look what is happening! Maybe some will start listening next time justified warnings are given! JWB

Special Series This Issue

If we really desire to preach the gospel, we should study the sermons preached by the apostles. Some criticize the church today for "answering questions nobody is asking." Others say the gospel is irrelevant in our educated and intellectual society. Let us take a page from the preaching of Paul. We will see the criticisms are nonsense. Paul was in the city of ancient intellectualism and preached God as the Creator, Jesus as the resurrected Savior, and the coming judgment. Nobody was asking about these things, but they should have been. Our series discusses Paul's sermon on Mars Hill in Athens. We would insist the message he preached needs to be preached now. Faithful gospel preachers still preach this same truth.



JAMES W. BOYD

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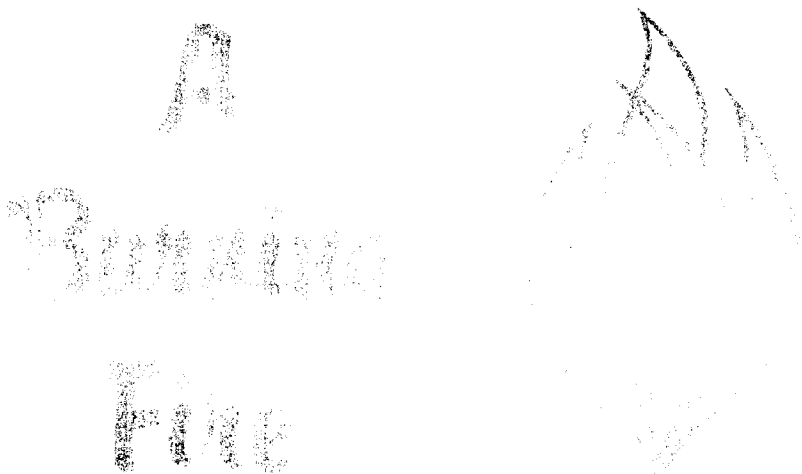
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A Burning Fire
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McMINNVILLE, TN 37110

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

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Anno Domini

Our lesson is especially appropriate as we pass from one calendar year to another. The words “anno domini” are Latin for “the year of our Lord.” It is abbreviated as A.D. The year 1991, A.D. indicates approximately one thousand nine hundred ninety one years since the birth of Christ. While much of the world ignores Him and is ignorant of Him, yet, the entire world dates the events of history according to his birth.

Let us consider the phrase, “the year of our Lord.” Let us think of the forthcoming year, whatever that year might be, as a year that truly belongs to the Lord rather than to self. It is the Lord’s year. In just twelve short months we will have swiftly run through another calendar. What shall we be able to say of this current year once it is passed? Will it have been a year of the Lord?

As with all other matters regarding our relationship with God, this is a very personal matter and each must make the decision for himself. It is a decision that must be made early in the year lest part of the year be gone before we start our direction. May we outline a course of action that each can take that would do much to make the year a year of God.

Conditions in Samaria

Turning back to the Old Testament, let us set the scene before us of an event in the long ago. Samaria was under siege from Syria. The Syrians had a stranglehold on the city, nothing permitted to come in or out. The people were on the verge of starvation, and what food was left was of tremendous price.

Second Kings 7:3,4, *“And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why*

sit we here until we die? If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they kill us, we shall but die." Siege or no siege, these four men had a difficult life suffering from leprosy. They had a choice from three alternatives: (1) go into the city and die of starvation with the others; (2) stay where they were and die there; (3) surrender to the Syrians with the hope that the Syrians might provide for them. The Syrians could do no worse than kill them, and they were going to die with either of the other alternatives. Their only hope for life was the third alternative, and this is what they chose.

Second Kings 7:5-7, "And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there. For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life."

Not What They Expected

To the surprise of the lepers they found the well-furnished camp vacated. The Lord had caused the Syrians to flee, thinking they were going to be attacked by a superior force. They had left all of their provisions behind them.

Seeing the tremendous abundance, the lepers began indulging themselves to the fullest, plundering tent after tent, hoarding up everything they wanted. They gloried in their good fortune and were for a time oblivious and unconcerned about the plight of the masses of people in Samaria that still were very much in need. Even though the city was no longer in danger, the people were not aware of it. There was great supply available but those that needed it were not informed of it.

Verse nine tells of a change of heart and action by the lepers. One said, *"We do not well: this day is a day of good*

tidings, and we hold our peace." The enemy gone, with food in abundance, they knew they needed to tell others about the salvation that was before them for the taking.

They returned to the city and told of their finding. There was some skepticism among some, but soon the report was confirmed and the people rushed out to the camp and were spared the disaster they anticipated. The good ending of this account is attributed to the fact that the lepers came to realize something we must realize also. Good news deserves to be told. Those who know it are obligated to tell it, and especially when others are so dependent on it.

Good News

Since Jesus was born in Bethlehem, lived in Palestine, died, was buried and raised from the dead to offer forgiveness of sins and eternal life to those who would follow Him, this good news deserves to fall upon the heart and ears of everyone. Since there is a source of joy, peace, hope and life for mankind, all people ought to know about it. But who will tell it? Who can tell it except those who know it? Just as the lepers were the only ones who could tell their good news, Christians are the only ones who can tell the good news, the gospel, of Jesus Christ.

We dare not do as did the lepers at first and simply indulge ourselves in the blessings of God, unconcerned for others. The world is sin-cursed and spiritually starving. The faith of Christ is God's great blessing to all nations. The very nature of it demands that it be spread abroad.

We ask, "Could it be that we are not sufficiently impressed as to the worth of our spiritual blessings to the degree that we want others to know of them?" Let me ask, "Would you inform others if you had the cure for cancer? Would you keep silent if you had the solution to international tensions and a sure prevention of future wars?"

It may sound strange, but many "Christians" act as if they have nothing worthwhile to tell. They do not act as if starving people need what they know. They do not rejoice as we might expect of a dying man who has been given life. If we are not impressed and thankful for our redemption, how can we expect others to desire it?

One historian has predicted that the twentieth century will be noted as the century when America became aggressively anti-Christian. There is only one way to prevent it. This is a day of sin, rebellion, disbelief and the scoffer is having his way. It is a day of spiritual starvation and people are besieged by Satan and the forces of evil, and often through choice. But it also a day of great discovery, good news, a day that can be a day of deliverance and spiritual abundance. Christ has come and has done His work in providing for mankind's salvation. God cares for us, loves us, wants us for His spiritual children, and has provided the way to come to Him. We know that way is revealed in Scripture. How can we keep silent and keep it to ourselves, not being concerned for others and future generations?

Love for the Lost

There is no surer sign of a converted person than his passion for the lost. You cannot be a faithful Christian and not care about souls around you. But how else do we show we care except by telling them the glad account of redemption? There is not one for whom the Lord does not have great interest. "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature,*" was a part of His final instructions to His people (Mark 16:15). Millions know not of the love God has for them and their way of security.

True, some will not hear it and cast it aside once they do hear it. Others will scoff and ridicule. Some will contend that such a message is "too good to be true" and dismiss it. But we who know the favor of God cannot retract the preaching of salvation because some might reject it. Fishermen do not pull in their lines because every fish is not caught. We are fishers of men and we cannot afford to abandon the cause of saving souls.

We can make any forthcoming year a "year of the Lord" if we will devote time and effort to the saving of some lost soul. If each Christian would resolve to tell the story of Jesus and His love to his family, friends, neighbors, fellow-workers, acquaintances, some will hear and heed even if many, probably most, might not. In a proper manner, with the perfect message, we can come to the end

of this year and look back upon it with great satisfaction that we did, indeed, make it a year of the Lord.

Living each day in the faithful service of our Master is needful to make the year one for God. Worshipping, studying, praying, conducting ourselves in the imitation of Christ is what we must do. But without fear, timidity or apology, we should be active in reaching for others. Will you be among those who will let the glad tidings of spiritual plenty be known? Will you start today, and not let any part of the year slip away?

You talk about the weather,
And the crops of corn and wheat;
You speak of friends and neighbors
That pass along the street;
You call yourself a Christian,
And like the gospel plan;
Then why not speak for Jesus,
And speak out like a man?
Are you ashamed of Jesus
And the story of His cross,
That you lower His pure banner
And let it suffer loss?
Have you forgot His suffering?
Did He die for you in vain?
If not, then live and speak for Jesus,
And speak out like a man!

* * * * *

What Doth Hinder Me?

Take your Bible and read Acts 8:26-39, the record of the conversion of the man from Ethiopia. Our attention shall focus on the question, "*What doth hinder me to be baptized?*" Christian friend, let someone who is not yet a Christian read this brief study. It could bring them to the Savior with understanding and conviction.

After Philip preached and the Ethiopian heard, baptism was requested. Before Philip baptized him, however, there was a point of concern that had to be settled. Nothing hindered this baptism because the Ethiopian, having heard the gospel, believed it, and knowing what he must do, obeyed as he was taught, and went on his way rejoicing.

What hinders people from being baptized today? Obviously something hinders them. From time to time all hindrances are removed and overcome and one comes requesting to be baptized in obedience to the gospel plan. But many hear and do not respond favorably. They are lost and bound for eternal punishment as they are. Yet, when opportunity is afforded them to obey they turn away and refuse. Since Deity has done all that Deity is going to do, having provided salvation through the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, and with the inevitable judgment coming for us all, and it being clear as to what man's duty is, what doth hinder? Let us stress that whatever it is, it is costly because it prevents salvation. But we are convinced that there are honest and sincere people who would be baptized except they are confused, misinformed and simply do not realize the importance of baptism. There are also some, doubtless, who are just prejudiced, ignorant and intend to remain so. Some may be stubborn and too filled with pride to surrender to Jesus Christ.

Confusion

Some are hindered because they are confused as to what is truly valuable in life. We love to live, but often are mixed

up as to what is the real meaning of our existence. There is a confusion of values.

Careless

Possibly there are some who do not care about life, and some even destroy their lives. But most people are busy striving for something that they consider to be of some value. Some seek fame, worldly prestige, worldly knowledge, comfort, ease, pleasure, material gain, etc. Others just want to live life the way they please without regard to their duty to God and their fellowman. "Do your own thing" and "what's in it for me?" is the philosophy that has captured so many. They want no restrictions and even deny the existence of God before acknowledging any accountability to Him.

Duty

But no person rightly understands life until he realizes that his primary duty is to "*fear God and keep his commandments.*" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Even if one gains the whole world but loses his soul he profits nothing (Mark 8:36). Life does not consist of our possessions (Luke 12:15). "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*" (Proverbs 1:7; Psalm 11:10). "*In the way of righteousness is life.*" (Proverbs 12:28). People need to ask what they hold as their priorities. Once they get this matter straightened out, they will be more inclined to follow His directions.

Need

Others are confused as to the necessity of salvation. Many false teachers have taught that sin is only as one thinks of it. They contend that there is no such thing as sin that damns the soul, if there even is a soul. Others teach that, even if sin is real, being a good moral person, a good citizen, a providing father, one who pays his debts, has few vices, and is a respectable person in the community, even religious and member of some church is all that they need. Thinking this, they will not act. Nobody acts until they realize they must act. Probably the masses of people who are concerned for the soul have the idea that they shall enter heaven because they have a "pretty good record."

The Bible teaches that salvation is not earned nor merited. We cannot be good enough to go to heaven on our own righteousness. Those that are saved must be "*in Christ*." This is where salvation is (Second Timothy 2:10), and where all spiritual blessings are provided (Ephesians 1:3). Escape from condemnation is "*in Christ*" (Romans 8:1). We can be saved only through Christ (Acts 4:12; John 14:6). How many times must people read this to accept it? Nobody is "*in Christ*" until they have obeyed what Scripture teaches one must do to get into Christ. "*For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ did put on Christ.*" (Galatians 3:27). Without being baptized, the Bible shows you have no other way to enter Christ.

In the various examples of conversion in Acts, we find Cornelius (Acts 10), Saul (Acts 9), Lydia (Acts 16), and all the others who were good moral people still lost because they were not yet "*in Christ*."

Cost

Some are hindered because they are confused regarding the cost of being a Christian. Being a Christian does have costs because the life of a Christian is a different, restricted and regulated life with many things that must be done and many things that are not to be done. There are duties of work, worship, sacrifice, purity, morality and other such matters that some have not properly considered. We do not doubt that there are hypocrites in the church because some have not counted the cost or are not willing to pay the cost. Hypocrisy on the part of a so-called Christian has been a barrier to many from considering becoming a Christian because they are repulsed by such hypocrisy they see in the lives of those who do not take the cost of Christianity seriously. It is important, however, that we note how the hypocrite is not acceptable to God and is not an acceptable excuse for anyone to refuse becoming a Christian. It simply means that two souls are lost, both the hypocrite and the one out of Christ.

We are not to think that any of us will reach perfection before we are baptized, or even after being baptized. Even those "*in Christ*" will sin (First John 1:8-10). Christ is the only one to live perfectly (First Peter 2:22). But we, like Paul, "*press on toward the mark for the prize of the high*

calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:14). We are not expected to be perfect even though we strive toward perfection. But we are expected to be faithful and keep on keeping on walking with the Lord (Revelation 2:10).

While some may think they are good enough to be saved without obeying the Lord in baptism, the Bible teaches that nobody ever reaches that point. The fact that we cannot be good enough is why we must be baptized because in baptism we are washed clean by the blood of Christ (Romans 6:3,4). Our victory is "*in Christ*" (First Corinthians 15:57). Until one is "*in Christ*" he remains lost.

Knowledge

Some are hindered from being baptized because they are confused as to how much truth they must know before they can be properly baptized. How much did those in the New Testament know? They were taught that they were in sin, could not save themselves, needed a Savior, God had provided a Savior and that Jesus Christ is the Savior. They were taught how to get into Christ and what it means to be in His body, the church. The early evangelists preached Christ and His kingdom (the church). When people learned these things, they inquired what they must do, and when told to be baptized following repentance and confession, believing what they had been taught, they obeyed and were added to the saved, the church.

There was much that they had to learn thereafter. Their knowledge of worship, daily living, all the unique duties and features of being a Christian had yet to be taught them. But having made the commitment to follow Christ wherever it took them, knowing these things, they were able to begin. They knew they were dependent on God and the blood of Christ and they learned how to reach that blood and were washed clean of their sins. With this knowledge, they were baptized. Do you already know as much, including the meaning of repentance and being in the church? If so, what doth hinder you to be baptized?

Some think they have been baptized when actually they have only been sprinkled. Thinking this, they do not submit to baptism. Some think they have been baptized because they were immersed, but they were immersed

without knowing the purpose of baptism as the Bible teaches. They were immersed to join some denomination or because they thought they were already saved or something other than "*for the remission of sins*" and to get into Christ which is essential to salvation. Such people need to follow the teaching of Acts nineteen when Paul found some who had been immersed with an invalid baptism. They were baptized again, this time "*in the name of the Lord Jesus,*" meaning by His authority, as He commanded, for the reason He taught. Only then were they right before God.

Errors

Men teach so many false doctrines that many are confused just what they must do to be saved. It is not because the Word of God is confusing, but because men have substituted their own doctrines. Some say we have nothing to do and that it is entirely God's work. Others say to "pray through," expecting some kind of direct operation of the Holy Spirit to save them. "Just place your hand on the radio or television," and say some statement the false teacher reads to you, is the message of some. "Simply ask Jesus to come into your heart," is often heard from others. On and on are the many false answers men give as to how to be saved. What does Scripture teach?

In Acts two the people on Pentecost were told to repent and be baptized. Acts eight, the Samaritans heard the gospel, believed it and were baptized. Again Acts eight, the Ethiopian heard the gospel, believed it, confessed his faith in Christ and was baptized. Acts nine, twenty-two and twenty-six, Saul heard the Word, believed it, repented and was baptized. Acts sixteen, Lydia heard, believed and was baptized. Acts eighteen and verse eight, "*And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed, and were baptized.*"

When we take the whole counsel of God, we see that people heard the gospel, believed it, repented of sins, confessed their faith in Christ, and were baptized for the remission of sins and into Christ. When they did this they were added to the saved, the church (Acts 2:47). These are precisely the steps that Jesus said must be taken (John 8:24; Luke 13:3; 12:8,9; Mark 16:16). There is no need for anyone to be confused over this all important matter.

Now is the Time

Some may be confused as to when to act. "Am I too old? Am I too young? Should I wait? When should I be baptized?" It is the plea of the devil to get people to postpone doing what ought to be done immediately. Having an understanding of what is involved, there should be no hesitation.

The Lord says we should act while there is time and opportunity. As our hymn says, "Today is the day of salvation; tomorrow may be too late." In the New Testament those who were properly taught and were convicted were baptized immediately, straightway, the same hour of the night, even while traveling along the road. They did not wait nor allow the devil to plant additional hindrances in their way. Salvation was too important for them to let needless delay hinder them.

If you have not been baptized in the name of Christ for the remission of sins you are in a lost spiritual condition. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, will repent of sins, confess your faith in Christ and be baptized today, the Lord will add you to His church, the company of the saved, and into the fellowship of the redeemed. Whatever may have hindered you in the past, it is not worth your precious soul. It is not worth suffering hell and losing heaven.

* * * * *

Jesus Washes His Disciples' Feet

The pattern of presenting these sermons in this booklet makes it necessary to ask the reader to read the longer texts from his own copy of the Bible. The amount of space required to reproduce what is already in your hands does not justify copying the lengthy passages. Please read John 13:1-17.

Observe that this is a record of a very important event in the life of Jesus on earth. It took place during His last week just prior to His crucifixion. Several momentous events occurred during those few days, including His entry into Jerusalem, discourses with Greeks, cleansing the temple, stormy sessions with His enemies, giving instructions for the observance of the Passover and others.

This event took place on what we call Thursday evening during the week of the last Passover. It was during this gathering that He instituted the Lord's Supper, choosing the ingredients to be used and assigning the significance of them, and noting when this memorial was to be observed once His kingdom came. The passage also tells how He washed the feet of His disciples.

A Difficult Hour

It was a trying and sad time in the life of Jesus. This was His final assembly with His hand-picked apostles before His death on the cross. After this would come the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, the heart-rending experience of being betrayed by Judas, being turned over to His enemies, the trials and crucifixion. All that Jesus could expect from this moment forward was the worst kind of mental, emotional and physical pain, grief, torture and disappointment. Verse one tells us that Jesus knew His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father. He knew the end was near.

This was a sad hour also because He dearly loved His apostles. Saying good-bye often comes with difficulty among loved one, especially when you know there awaits great hardship for all involved. Even though the apostles were not aware of the implications of all that was taking place, Jesus was very aware of what it meant to Him and to them, as well as to us.

We are reminded of the sad farewell given to Paul, recorded in Acts 20:36-38, when Paul said good-bye to his brethren of Ephesus with whom he had labored so patiently and faithfully. Their mutual love was strong.

Jesus showed His love for His apostles this night by calling them His friends, praying for their welfare and

guidance, asking for their protection, and even being an arbitrator for their release when the mob came to seize Him. Verse one reads, *"Having loved his own... he loved them unto the end."*

Lacking Preparation

This was also a sad hour for Jesus because those whom He loved were still so unprepared and unsuspecting of what would soon take place. Men would array themselves against the Son of God in a vicious and determined manner. Whenever people do this it always results in their detriment. What was ironic about the vindictive actions taken this night, they would be done by the very ones Jesus came to save and to whom He went first. Truth would be mocked and God would be blasphemed as He was ridiculed. Justice would be denied and hatred displayed. This must have been exceptionally difficult for our Lord.

Not only that, His own chosen twelve would forsake Him, one betraying Him, and another denying he ever knew Him, not once but thrice. They all would be ashamed and afraid to be identified with Him. All of this was in the heart of Jesus as He rises to perform the service of washing the feet of His disciples.

Why did Jesus do this? What did He seek to accomplish? We can more easily grasp and understand what Jesus was doing if we know the background of the occasion and become aware of a serious problem that had developed even among His apostles.

The Problem of Judas

One problem was Judas and his behavior. Jesus loved Judas, but Judas allowed greed, jealousy, hatred, selfishness and other evils to find root in his heart. He cultivated himself so that the devil found fertile soil to plant the seeds of betrayal.

Ambition

The apostles had argued among themselves also. They discussed who would be the greatest after Jesus left them. They did not even comprehend the impact of Jesus leaving,

but still they argued over rank and position. While Jesus was with them this subject need not arise. But He told them He would leave and rather than be concerned about that, they were concerned who would be chief among them.

This is not the first time this problem had arisen. James and John came with their mother to Jesus one day and she asked Him the favor that her sons would sit on His right and left hands in His kingdom. She did not understand the nature of the kingdom He was to establish, nor the impropriety of her request. But she touched off maneuvering among them for position. Jealousy aroused them (Matthew 20:20-24). Luke tells of this trouble on this very evening (Luke 22:24), "*And there was also strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.*"

With all of the trials hovering over Jesus at this moment, He was pained to see this strife among them, their competition, their concern for self, desire for power, prestige, rank among men. It was a sorry display of misunderstanding on their part. But has this desire for rank among brethren ceased to exist?

Words, Not Deeds

Jesus, having often taught His disciples by words, now turns to teach them by deeds. He teaches a lesson both they, and every follower of Christ, must learn. He assumes the role of a servant, even though He is Master of all. He humbles Himself and performs the menial task usually done by the lowly.

He had said, "*Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.*" (Matthew 18:4). "*But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant; Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*" (Matthew 20:25-28). A similar teaching is

recorded in Luke 22:25-27. Jesus, the Master, was teaching humility and service to others, doing as He had spoken.

This task of washing the feet of the disciples was something none of the others had assumed. To have done so would have been an admission of lowliness and not becoming of one seeking position. When guests came to a home the servants of the host would perform this work. But now, all wanted to be the guest of honor, important and prominent. Being in a rented room, none felt obligated to serve. So Jesus humbled Himself before them and does what the others thought beneath them to do.

Particular attention is given to Peter's reaction to this. When Jesus came to him he seemed to realize that Jesus was doing what some of them ought to have done, and he refused to let Jesus wash his feet. But Jesus said in substance, "Either you let me teach you this lesson or you have no part of me." Peter quickly relented. Is it not true that we cannot have fellowship with Christ if we are void of humility and have a willingness to serve? Read Philippians 2:2-8 and learn how Jesus humbled Himself and served. Is He not our example to do as did He?

I have often tried to imagine the scene when Jesus bowed before Judas to wash his feet. Judas was still present and knew that he planned to betray Jesus. Jesus also knew what Judas had planned. What a tense and agonizing moment it must have been for Judas and Jesus, seeing how Judas was condemning himself.

His Real Lesson

By washing the disciples' feet Jesus was teaching, by a great and unparalleled object lesson, the blessedness, appropriateness and Christlikeness of service and humility, the sacrifice of pride that must be a part of Christian character. How the Lord must grieve when there is strife among brethren over position, rank, power, prestige and glory among men. Did not John severely condemn Diotrophes because he wanted to have preeminence among the brethren (Third John 9)?

By this action Jesus answered the great question with a great answer. "Who shall be the greatest?" The Lord responds, "The one who is humble and serves."

James 4:6, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." Luke 14:7-11, "And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms, saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room, lest a more honorable man than thou be bidden of him, and he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher; then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." Proverbs 29:23, "Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud."

Not Worship

Some have mistakenly made "foot-washing" a religious act of worship, a ceremony, as if the act itself is what Jesus was commanding. They call it a "church ordinance." It is never so identified in Scripture nor is there any example anywhere of the early church practicing washing feet as an act of worship or anything other than an act of hospitality. It is mentioned only once after Pentecost (First Timothy 5:10), and it is a qualification for women who were to be supported by the church. She was to have demonstrated hospitality, Foot-washing is listed several times as an act of hospitality and caring for the needs of others, but never a religious act in worship. Foot-washing is an act of kindness, service, hospitality and ought not be changed into something the Lord never taught nor intended. It is not a religious ceremony. To so use it is more of a display of pseudo-piety than anything else. Usually, both feet are not washed by those who contend this act is what Jesus was commanding.

When Jesus said, "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet."

For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done unto you.” He explained the meaning of His words. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.” If He served, so should they. He, as Master and Lord, was to send them forth. They were not above doing what the Master did.

When He encountered Peter’s refusal to accept His service, Jesus told him he did not understand what Jesus was doing. Peter could see that Jesus was washing feet, but that was not what He was really doing as far as the significance of the act was concerned. He was teaching a lesson we all must learn which is humility and service.

Matthew 23:12, *“And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”* James 4:10, *“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and he shall lift you up.”* Colossians 3:12, *“Put on therefore as the elect of God... humbleness of mind.”* First Peter 5:5,6, *“Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.”*

* * * * *

Two Things I Think You’ll Want To Do

- 1. If you have not yet ordered your copy of the book, *System of Salvation*, Comments on Romans, you need to do that right away. 288 pages and Hardback ; \$10 per copy (tax included); plus \$2 to ship it to you.**
- 2. You don’t want to miss the back cover this issue. You may never forgive yourself if you should overlook it.**

The Way of Seth and Cain

Matthew 7:13,14, *“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”*

Matthew 12:30, *“He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.”*

There are two directions that a person can go. One way leads to destruction and the other to life. Strange as it may be, most will take the broad way that destroys. Each must make his individual choice who to serve and which direction to go. He cannot decide to just stand still and remain as is. Life, time and the nature of right and wrong insists that we be moving one direction or the other.

In the Old Testament the two ways that people can go are exemplified by the ways of Cain and Seth and their descendants. After the murder of Abel a curse was placed upon Cain which was, he thought, greater than he could bear. Cain had a son whose name was Enoch (not the famous Enoch who walked with God). Cain's son built a city. The descendants of Cain are listed in the last part of Genesis, chapter four. They were a very enterprising, highly skilled, trained and accomplished people. But they were an ungodly race.

Of Cain we read, *“By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.”* (Hebrews 11:4). Abel acted by faith, which implies God had given instructions what was to be done and Abel did as instructed. *“Faith cometh of*

hearing and hearing by the word of God.” (Romans 10:17). By his obedient faith Abel was declared righteous.

About Cain

Cain became wroth, jealous and later murdered his brother, even denying his guilt when confronted with it. *“Where is thy brother Abel?”* the Lord asked him. Cain answered in a manner to pretend innocence and ignorance, asking, *“Am I my brother’s keeper?”* Cain’s sins are numerous. He was guilty of disobeying God’s instructions regarding the sacrifice, guilty of will-worship (doing things according to his own will rather than God’s will), jealousy, envy, uncontrolled anger, murder, lying, hypocrisy, and attempting to escape personal responsibility. First John 3:12 tells us that he was wicked and his works were evil. Jude eleven warns of false teachers and states, *“Woe unto them, for they have gone the way of Cain,”* the way of woe, sin and death.

The descendants of Cain continued his iniquity in their own lives. They were not guilty of Cain’s sin, but were guilty of their own sins. Doubtless they were highly influenced by their wicked ancestor. Lamech was the first polygamist, a man of personal vengeance and murder. Cain’s descendants were not savages, uncivilized, cave men, but people of exceptional capacity and ability. Jubal was a musician. Jabal was a herdsman. Tubal-Cain was a worker of copper and iron. Some were farmers, builders of cities, and other accomplishments. They developed a rather high level of civilization and skills.

Lesson to Learn

Herein is a lesson that those of us in our own modern, scientific and sophisticated era need to learn. Civilization is not a substitute for a proper religious faith. High standards of living in a material world do not replace the necessity of obedience to God. We often hear people extolling the value of education as if that was the solution to all of man’s ills. They urge people to develop skills, train themselves, have equipment, build schools universities, etc. in order to have a higher standard of living as far as the material side of life is concerned. All

such things have certain value. But that is not the end of the matter.

Our nation has the highest standard of living of any nation in the world. Literacy rates are higher than many places in the world. We have stressed education to the point that some have made learning their god. But all this has not made Americans more moral, more peace-loving, more honest or more dependable. In fact, as the nation has placed an emphasis on these things the lives of people generally have become more corrupt, sin abounds, evil is adored and we have a generation that calls evil good and good evil.

We are not anti-education. But when we stress education to the neglect of spiritual, religious and moral training we are only building a nation of civilized animals with great skills. They are more dangerous than anybody. By education we only doctor the symptoms of man's degeneracy and never deal with his real problem, which is sin. The nation is suffering from a barrage of misplaced priorities.

Crying to Us

The development of civilization is proper and can be a blessing. But it also can be a curse when not guided and controlled by faith and morals. Skill is a blessing when seasoned and directed. But skill can be a curse when left without guidance and when considered to be the solution to all of man's needs, wants and goals. Scripture and history are crying to us to learn this truth before disaster.

The reason nuclear energy is a danger and threat to mankind is because of the lack of morality among people. That power could be of great benefit to mankind when channeled and controlled properly. But because of the void of faith and ethics that God would have us follow, we constantly face the danger of blowing the world to pieces.

We live in a world with ever-increasing pressures to suppress the importance of strong moral convictions. Learning that is sought outside the framework of religious discipline from God is one of the spiritual "cancers" that has diseased the educational processes in our nation. A

dominant theme among the nation's so-called "scholars" is to ridicule the reality of God, destroy faith in the hearts and minds of the young, replace God on His throne with man on the throne, having the universal edict to "do your own thing." But no person is truly educated who is ignorant of God's will regardless of how accomplished he might be in his worldly and intellectual pursuits. He is just a highly trained and knowledgeable creature without restraint.

Proverbs 1:7, "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.*" Psalm 111:10, "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth forever.*" When a person respects and obeys God, he is by far a greater contributor to the welfare of his fellowman than all of the "wise men" and their inventions who care not for God. The lineage of Cain proved this. They had skills, civilization, cities, etc. but we have no example of any of them walking with God.

True Wisdom

As for the relative value of human wisdom to God's wisdom, Paul wrote, "*Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*" (First Corinthians 1:25). What some call "foolishness," Paul says is better, stronger, wiser and more beneficial than the wisdom of men. "*For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, the Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.*" (First Corinthians 3:19,20). Godly people had rather their children learn their "A, B, C's" in heaven than to read Greek and shoot rockets in hell. It need not be an either-or situation. One can be educated, civilized and godly. But the line of Cain is a line of human wisdom being placed above God's wisdom and the result is pride, vanity, sin, exaltation of man above Deity, and rebellion to man's own harm. It is the way of death.

Too many are trying to measure God by man's standard rather than measuring man by the infallible standard of God. This attitude and action constitutes one of the most

threatening hazards facing the world. To sacrifice God's truth on the altar of what is called "education and scholarship" is a demonstration of the foolishness of men.

Genesis 4:25,26, *"And Adam knew his wife again: and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: For God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew. And to Seth, to him there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the Lord."*

People of Seth

While Cain's descendants pursued one course that proved to bring hardship upon themselves and brought more and more sin into the world, Seth and his posterity took another course. They went the opposite direction. They sought the ways of the Lord.

There is not a great amount of revelation concerning Seth and his descendants except this. We do read of one man named Enoch that seemed to characterize that lineage. Genesis 5:24, *"And Enoch walked with God: and he was not: for God took him."* The implication of this statement is that Enoch was of a certain quality of character that God brought him into the halls of immortality and into the presence and company of God.

Another descendant of Seth was Noah. He is presented to us as one who was upright before God and his generation. He walked with God (Genesis 6:9), and found favor in the sight of the Lord and he did as the Lord commanded him (Genesis 6:22). He was the man who lived in the midst of a generation that had decayed to such low levels that God determined to destroy mankind, even repenting that He had made man. But Noah was able to be righteous and even rear his family to be upright to the point that God spared Noah, his wife, Noah's three sons and their wives. This family preserved the human family.

Their Choice

We are not to think that the people of Seth ignored the development of their skills and abilities. Noah was able to build the ark, which was not a small engineering

accomplishment. The difference between these two families is where they placed their emphasis, what they considered most important, and how they acted in response to their very different convictions. The line of Seth enjoyed the fellowship with Deity, the blessings of immortality with God and are even yet noted for the wisdom of their choice of direction in life. They chose life while Cain and his people chose death.

As noted earlier, each one is forced to make his choice. As Moses neared the close of a life of one hundred twenty years, having spent the last forty of them leading Israel from Egypt toward the promised land of Canaan, he said to his people, *"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."* (Deuteronomy 30:19).

In similar fashion, Joshua, who succeeded Moses, as he came to the close of his illustrious career as the leader of Israel and the deliverer of Canaan for Israel, said to those he led, *"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, (having reference to the swollen Jordan they had crossed, JWB) 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 that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."* (Joshua 24:14,15).

Your Choice

As you read this lesson, please be impressed with the necessity of choosing which direction you will go. In the inspired words written by Paul in Second Thessalonians 3:5, *"And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."* May it be that you will know the salvation in going the way of Seth.

* * * * *

Our Lord Knew It

Wish We Would Learn It

When Jesus prayed for unity, recorded in John seventeen, the eighteenth verse tells us one reason why He wanted unity. *"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."*

One contributing factor to the growth of disbelief in Christ is the chaotic division that exists among those who profess to be Christians. This condition has been propagated and exploited by the denominational world to the extent people of sense realize that no person of sound mind would ever originate it. Therefore, they dismiss the Christ.

But many reject the Lord's church for similar reasons. The division among those of the church presents a distorted Christ. Some years ago those steeped in human legalism divided the church with "anti" doctrines that tore the church apart in many places. More likely today, the church is not only being divided but restructured and destroyed by the liberal digressives. Teaching doctrines foreign to truth but more compatible to denominationalism, they are making havoc of the church and causing division and alienation from faithful brethren.

What is astounding is how some, who profess soundness, continue to use, promote and endorse the men, schools, events, programs and papers that promote this digression.

Neither those who transgress the doctrine of Christ nor those who bid them Godspeed are faithful to God and they violate Second John 9-11. It is most disturbing how so many who are doing such things do not seem to really care..
JWB

**William
Lee
Hagewood**



On December 19, 1990, this fine boy was born to Amy and Lowell Hagewood. Amy is our daughter. Lee joins his older brother, James, in their home in Nashville, Tennessee.

Lee is our eighth grandchild, our sixth grandson. Mrs. Jean Hagewood, Franklin, Tennessee, is the other grandparent. We look forward to loving this little boy as we have already since we heard he was coming our way. He is blessed with such a wonderful father and mother.

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

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Ahab

Character studies are profitable in coming to a knowledge of the Bible. Amid historical wreckage of the nation of Northern Israel lies a king whose name was Ahab. He was on the throne once ruled by the idolatrous king Jeroboam. *"And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that were before him. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him."* (First Kings 16:30,31).

But even from his wicked life we can learn and profit. Ahab had abundant spiritual deficiencies. Some characters are admirable and we should imitate them. Others are abominable and we should learn to avoid their ways, and escape the results of their tragedies. Ahab is of the latter sort. He had at least four symptoms of spiritual disease.

Pouter

Ahab was a pouter. First Kings 21:1-4, *"And it came to pass after these things, that Naboth, the Jezreelite, had a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab, king of Samaria. And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard, that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. And Naboth said to Ahab, The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the inheritance of my fathers unto thee. And Ahab came into his house heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoke to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and turned his face, and would eat no bread."*

You would think a leader would be a person of greater dignity, self-control, and maturity than to pout when he did

not get his way. But Ahab went home and crawled into bed, and gazed at the wall, refusing to even eat. Naboth refused to sell, and we can understand why one might choose not to sell the land he had inherited. He had that right. In fact, he was obligated to preserve it for his heirs as had been done for him. Yet, Ahab reacted like a long-faced pouter when he was refused.

Pouting accomplishes three things: (1) It attracts attention to the pouter, temporarily. (2) In time it makes the pouter sick, being detrimental to good mental and physical health. It is much like holding a grudge, and having a vengeful spirit. It harms the person of that nature more than anyone else. (3) It exposes the weak and immature character of the unstable pouter. But pouting never accomplishes any good.

Pouting is a coward's way of hitting back, getting even against someone or something he does not like. It is not a Christian tool. The more one observes a pouter, the more one is convinced that the pouter really enjoys pouting.

There is a story of two brothers who lived in the same house. They had a spat, and walled up the doors leading from one side to the other, each keeping himself in his section. It was inconvenient with the kitchen on one side, the bathroom on the other; the front porch one place and the basement off limits to the other. A mutual friend suggested they get together. But the reply was, "No, we had rather stay mad." So often it is that way with some people, especially people who pout. They are not "happy" unless they are unhappy, and unless they can make a fuss over something and pout about it. They had rather hurt themselves and others than to discontinue their pouting. They enjoy it. They have a bad case of Ahab's spiritual disease.

Coward

Ahab also let others do his fighting for him. First Kings 21:5-7, *"But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said unto him, Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou eatest no bread? And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money; or else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it: and he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard."*

Even though he was king, he lacked the courage and strength to stand for himself and for what he desired. He showed himself willing to let Jezebel do his fighting for him. She began to act, and in a viciously wicked way.

There is a difference in having people stand **with** you in a fight, and having people stand **instead of** you in a fight. Letting another stand in your place when you ought to stand for yourself is an error committed by many good men as well as evil. It is a mark of weakness, fear, cowardice, and a lack of manliness. Especially is this true when you are called to stand for some truth. Some will not oppose sin, but are glad to see somebody else oppose it. They do not want to become involved lest they become hurt in some way. They are willing to let everybody else fight and suffer whatever hardship may come as a result of standing. They will shirk their duty and allow others to carry all the load. How many times have I seen this happen, even among brethren.

Shirker

Shirking responsibility is often evident. It is not uncommon for people to fail to hold up the hands of those who take the lead. Warriors of God sometimes have to fight a rear-guard action against some of the very ones who ought to be in the fight themselves. Parents let the church or school do what the parents are supposed to do. Father will let mother do all the spiritual training, even as his example is negative to what she is trying to do. Church members "hire" a preacher to do all their work. When false teachers arise from time to time, many just go and hide and do nothing, not even support those who try to refute it. Is such as that Christlike?

Ahab's conflict with Naboth was an evil one that revealed a flaw in his character and he was willing to let somebody else fight his battle, evil though his battle was evil. Are you guilty of doing this? If so, you probably have a case of Ahab's spiritual disease of being a shirker.

Again, Ahab let evil go unchecked without doing what he could, and had the authority, to stop it. Jezebel's wicked

plan was this. *"So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal, and sent letters unto the elders and to the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth. And she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people, and set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die."* (First Kings 21:8-10). This was legalized murder.

Conspirator

No person can fail to see the conspiracy and wickedness in all this. Few could have done anything to stop it. Of course, Jezebel could have stopped it because she started it. The rulers of the city to whom she sent the letters could have stopped it. What characters they must have been! But Ahab could have stopped it also. While he did not conceive the plan, nor conspire for false witnesses, he was the king and the seal was his, but he kept still. He allowed Naboth to be falsely accused and killed. He had the authority to act, but he did not act.

He was responsible because God held him responsible. God sent Elijah to him, and Ahab was told, *"Thus saith the Lord, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession?"* (First Kings 21:19). No people faithfully serve God who will let sin proceed before them and not do what they can to see that righteousness prevails. To neglect, ignore sin, pretend all is well, or attempt to sweep duty under the rug, so to speak, only aggravates the violation of responsibility. To ignore wrong does not and cannot correct it, and it certainly is not showing oneself a friend of the truth. To allow evil to go unchecked is something for which many shall stand condemned.

Hater of Truth

Finally, Ahab hated those who told him the truth. Early in his reign, when famine was in the land, God sent Elijah to Ahab. When these two men met Ahab said, *"Art thou he that troubleth Israel?"* His bitterness toward Elijah was intense. But Elijah responded, *"I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou*

hast followed Baalim." (First Kings 18:18). Ahab hated Elijah because Elijah told him the truth.

On another occasion, when Ahab and Jehoshaphat joined forces to fight Syria, Jehoshaphat asked for a prophet. *"And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him? And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah, the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil."* (First Kings 22:7,8). Micaiah told him the truth, and this he really did not want.

After the terrible deed against Naboth, God sent Elijah to Ahab again to tell him of his sin. But Ahab considered God and Elijah as enemies. As Elijah approached, Ahab said, *"Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?"* (First Kings 21:20). Ahab was a person suffering from the spiritual deficiency of hating truth and those who spoke it.

Ahab cannot be considered without considering his spiritual errors, such as characterized this weak, sinful, wretch. Though prominent among men, he was foolish and evil. He was an abomination before God and a hindrance to the welfare of Israel. Pouting, letting others do his fighting, allowing evil to prevail, hating truth and the ones who told him the truth, he was a dark blot on the history of Israel.

How different from Ahab is the Christian to be! As Paul wrote regarding the Old Testament, we can learn from the past (Romans 15:4; First Corinthians 10:6-11). Will we learn from Ahab and avoid being the kind of person he was? Will we avoid his mistakes?

* * * * *

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**let me encourage you to do so right away!
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A Christ Centered Church

The church of the Bible is the church where Christ is the very heart, soul, and center. If we would be the New Testament church, we must be Christ centered. Our emphasis, theme, burden, and message is to be Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We want to learn how we can detect a Christ centered church.

First, we ascertain that it is right and necessary that the church be centered on Christ because He is the head of it. It is His body. He founded it and is the foundation of it. He purchased it with His own blood, reigns over it as King, and has all authority pertaining to it. Christ is the Savior of the church. Without Him there would be no church of Christ. It would be highly improper for the church to be centered or identified without anyone or anything else other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

There is no separation of Christ and His church. Some seem to think that emphasis on the church in some way detracts from Christ. They like to talk about "churchanity" as opposed to "Christianity." That is a trite phrase, but also one of the marks of a soft, false teacher who speaks lightly of the church. The early evangelists and apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit, preached Christ **and** His church. It was not either/or with them. The relationship between Christ and the church demands both be preached. You cannot preach the head without the body, nor the Savior apart from the saved, nor the King separated from His kingdom. And why should anyone want to attempt it? Beware of digressive tones that would separate Christ and the church.

In Word

The Lord's church is Christ centered in Word. The church is the "*pillar and ground of the truth.*" (First Timothy 3:15). Jesus is the truth (John 14:6). "*But we preach Christ....*" Paul wrote in First Corinthians 1:23. "*For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.*" (First Corinthians 2:2). Christ told His apostles to "*preach the gospel.*" (Mark 16:15). Philip preached Christ to the Samaritans and the Ethiopian (Acts 8). Whatever is revealed in Scripture concerning Christ, or related to Christ, as all Scripture is, is to be preached. He is to be glorified, praised, and presented as the One to whom people are directed. It is His will that is to be taught.

We are to proclaim Him as Lord (Philippians 2:11), as the Son of God (Matthew 16:16), as the Savior of men (First Timothy 1:15), and as the Christ (Acts 2:36).

For those who call themselves preachers to spend their time offering reviews on secular books, politics, economics, military advice, biographies of prominent and famous people of the world is to misuse the pulpit. The church is to proclaim the doctrine of Christ, by which is meant the doctrine Christ taught and authorized to be taught. Titus 2:1, "*But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine.*" Second John 9-11, a passage even many brethren seem to have removed from their Bibles, "*Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed. For he that biddeth him Godspeed is a partaker of his evil deeds.*" Paul warned against any so-called gospel other than what he had preached and that brethren had received (Galatians 1:6-9).

In Work

As in Word, the church must uphold Christ in its work. There is always the danger that a church will "major in minors, and minor in majors." Particularly is this a danger in a time of digression, such as we now witness

about us. Many present-day churches of Christ are getting away from the mission of the church, providing entertainment, recreation, gymnasiums, secular education, little league games, virtually invading the realm of the home, and being nothing much more than a poor man's country club. When a church fulfills its mission it will be busy. But it can be busy and still not be doing what the Lord commissioned the church to do.

The prime work of the church is to glorify God and spread the gospel of Christ throughout the world. The members are to live Christlike lives. There is a realm of benevolence to relieve the suffering of the needy. Also the church must build itself up, not just numerically, but more important, spiritually, a work called edification. But we must never "let the tail wag the dog."

One of the marks of digression historically has been for the church to become organically and financially involved in areas of activity for which there is no Biblical authority. When this happens the divinely assigned work of the church lags and becomes a sideline, if not eliminated. As an example, some churches have been financially unable to assist men to go into foreign fields of labor because their payments on their recreational facilities kept them burdened. Such a church could not qualify as a Christ centered church.

In Life

The church must show itself Christ centered by the daily lives of its members. The disciples are called Christians (Acts 11:26). One who is a Christian is a baptized believer, in Christ, following Christ, imitating Him in his life. A Christian who strives to live like Christ will not conform to the evil of this world. What the world sees of Christ, in many instances, is only that which is reflected in the lives of those who profess to be His disciples. When there is not that distinction due to godly living in the Christian's life, how can the church be called Christ centered?

A deadly, sinister relaxation and liberal permissiveness has gripped the world, even the religious world, in morals and ethics. The sinfulness of this world was once

opposed by religious people. But now, openly, such things as drinking, dancing, lasciviousness, adultery, immodesty, gambling, smoking, divorce, etc. are tolerated among so-called Christians. The love of this world, with its greed, prestige, pleasure, social standing and power is far too evident among even members of the church. Such behavior has compromised the truth, and can be found in most any congregation. **This ought not so to be.** Too many brethren act as if this does not really matter. But it matters to the point that it has brought reproach on the holy name of Christ and His church.

Voices in the world, and some in the church, admonish brethren to "liberalize or lose members." Some elderships, fearful of losing members and finances, have relaxed their stand for truth to accommodate the worldly-minded members. Some who are of that stripe have gone out from us, but many others have simply been tolerated, and that toleration is sinful.

God or Men

We need to ask ourselves if we seek to please men or God. In Jesus' day some turned and walked with Him no more because of His hard sayings. But He never did retract His hard sayings to accommodate those who rebelled against them, nor did He apologize that His truth offended them. **Nor should we.** When we teach today what He taught, and what the inspired men taught, we may witness the same reaction among many people. But so be it! As much as it pains us to see anybody turn away from the truth because they love this evil world, like Demas, we have the duty to stand for the truth regardless of the reaction among others. Already too many have taken their eye off the goal and looked so longingly at the "*fleshpots*" of spiritual Egypt and of this earthly life.

It would be an indication of good spiritual health when brethren would become alarmed and aroused when they hear of teaching and practices among them that are not Christ centered, regardless of their source. It would be good if brethren would become disturbed when the doctrine of Christ, at whatever point, is defiled and sin openly condoned, especially in the ranks of the church.

A Christ centered church is one whose members conform to Christ in their living.

This is Our Task

To build and maintain a Christ centered church in a sinful world is a difficult task. There are pressures from without and within to compromise, and depart from the truth, escape the hardship, and be at peace with everyone. There has developed a "go along to get along" attitude that has engulfed the thinking of many brethren who were once sound in the faith. These pressures are not likely to lessen, but in all probability increase as society generally becomes more arrogant, defiant, materialistic, and self-willed. But still we must plead for a Christ centered church.

To do what God expects of us demands that we adhere to the pattern revealed in the New Testament. Even though some today denounce what they ridicule as "pattern theology," this is still what God demands. A Christ centered church is not made one by beautiful buildings, large numbers, big contributions, many activities, acceptance by the community, a membership composed of the wealthy and prominent, a "namby-pamby" message of surrender, compromise, and accommodation of sin and false doctrines. Only by strict allegiance to "*thus saith the Lord*" can there be a Christ centered church. It is the task of every Christian to see that the church is just that way.

The church is composed of people who have been washed clean of their sins by the blood of Christ when they believed and obeyed the gospel being baptized into Christ for the remission of sins, and God adding them to the church. The church depends on Christ, and Christ must be at the very core of all pertaining to the church. He is to have the preeminence (Colossians 1:18).

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When you move, please advise us in advance if you possibly can. It would facilitate our mailing and reduce our mailing expenses.

From Doubt to Certainty

You should take your Bible and read the seventy-third Psalm, and keep it available for additional reference as you study this lesson. The lesson is intended to encourage us, keep life in its proper perspective, see things as God sees them, and enable us to live life more as God would have us live it. Certainly these goals are worthy.

God's Word is a *"lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."* (Psalm 119:105). Life is often fraught with challenges and pitfalls that yawn before us. There are those times and circumstances when understanding is lacking, and we wander in confusion, bewildered, and frustrated. Skepticism and doubt have often brought fear and uncertainty into the lives of even some of the strongest people. The inconsistencies, inequities, and injustices that we observe and experiences in life make us wonder why such things are allowed. When we see good suppressed and evil adored, we are prone to ask, "Why try to be good? Does it pay? Is following God the best way after all? Is it worthwhile?" We do not think it blasphemy to admit that these questions and problems have overtaken many who once loved God and sought to please Him. We do not think it improper to consider them since they can also beset us.

The Psalmist wrestles with such things in Psalm 73. He expresses some of the perplexities and uncertainties created by doubt. He asks some of these same questions that bother people today. He responds to the inquiry, "Why serve God?" He draws a conclusion from his inquiry by determining that we are at our best, and far better in every way, when we trust God.

A Clean Heart

Verse one affirms a great truth. *"Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart."* Of this he is certain. No doubt exists in his mind that God is good to those who have a clean heart. Please observe this qualification of being a recipient of God's blessings: namely, a clean heart.

Our hearts can be clean only when cleansed by the Lord . He cleans our hearts when we come to Him by and through His Son as revealed in His Word. First Peter 1:22, *"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently."*

What led the Psalmist to be so confident of this truth? By what line of thought, revelation, and reasoning did he become so sure of this position? Verse two shows he did not always have this same confidence. *"But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped."* There had been a time when he was not so dogmatic and positive , so sure as to assert what he did in verse one. He realizes there was a time when he knew his faith was slipping and the foundation on which he stood did not seem to be so strong and unmovable.

Once in Doubt

In verses three through fourteen, there is no question but the Psalmist was once skeptical of his choice in life to serve God. There were various things that had caused him to develop this skepticism. What had created his doubt and uncertainty within him?

Let us not be too self-righteous nor too hasty in judging the Psalmist for these feelings because many have wondered, if even only for a moment, about the things he expresses. He had allowed himself to become envious of the wicked. In his attempts to be righteous, he had developed self-pit. He felt cheated and left out of the "good things" of life, even though they were not good.

As he looked around him he could see the wicked prospering. They were strong to the point that even the reality of death did not deem to concern them. They did not appear to have troubles like many others. They were enjoying life to the fullest even though they were proud, violent, corrupt, wicked, and lofty in speech. They spoke against heaven and questioned the wisdom and knowledge of God. They were guilty of blasphemy. Yet, at the same time, their cup was full, and God's people seemed to fall before them. The wicked took from the righteous. Evil men relished the fatness of their gain, having all that their hearts could desire, and were apparently at ease, living in luxury, riches, and gaiety. He saw all of this and was tinged with envy.

On the other hand, here he was trying to do what was right, and was aware of his own sinfulness, seeking the Lord's mercy and His way, but was apparently being chastened and plagued rather than rewarded. All he did seemed to be in vain. What profit was there in what he was doing? What was the use of serving God? Those who did not serve Him seemed to get along better, at least as well, as those who did. So wrestling with such things, his faith waned, his confidence sagged, and he was not so sure that the way of righteousness was the best way.

The Explanation

But this apparent inequity and injustice had an explanation. His doubts could be answered. Verse fifteen, *"If I say, I will speak this, behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children."* He realized that such thinking was offensive and detrimental to himself and to others. Verses sixteen and seventeen, *"When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end."* His pain and grief was intense over these things **UNTIL** he went to God with it. His dilemma seemed so huge and overwhelming until he brought it to God and got His answer. When he learned God's viewpoint of this problem, then he understood, and his doubt was soon dissolved, and his certainty reaffirmed. Not until he got the overall look at matters did he grasp it. Focusing only on the present presented him with a distorted perception. Not until he raised his outlook and

remembered that his existence consisted of more than the here and now that he saw as God saw.

God Helped Him

What did he learn from God that helped him? Verses eighteen through twenty, *"Surely thou didst set them in slippery places; thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one waketh, so, O Lord when thou awakenest thou shalt despise their image."*

The end of the wicked is destruction. The place where they stood was not stable and secure as it seemed, but slippery, and they shall fall. Desolation is their ultimate destiny, and they shall terminate in terror. As in a moment, they shall reap the harvest of their iniquity because they have made themselves subjects to be despised by the righteous God. Their apparent prosperity on earth did not assure them for prosperity in the next life. Like the rich fool in Luke 16, *"Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things... but now... thou art in torment."* The so-called "good life" in sin here in this life did not bring them approval before God, but rather His wrath toward them.

Once the Psalmist saw the end of the wicked, he was both grieved and shamed. Verses twenty-one and twenty-two, *"Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee."*

A Better View

It was not so difficult for him to see how mistaken he had been in his evaluation of things, and completely wrong he had considered matters. His understanding was utterly void of the real truth regarding the righteous and the wicked. He was grieved because of the destiny of the wicked. None can rejoice in knowing what will become of the wicked. But he was also ashamed because he had been so foolish to become envious of such people, and to have allowed his confidence in God to be shaken by such things, by the temporal, material, worldly prosperity of

others in this world to bring this skepticism into his heart. He was ashamed to have ever doubted that the Lord's way is best.

Turning from his doubt, he began a more profitable exercise, a faith-building exercise, by counting his blessings that were his because of his faith in God. Verses twenty-three through twenty-six, *"Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion forever."*

No Fear

With God with him, he had no need to fear, knowing God's care for him. He was sustained by the hand of the Almighty and guided by divine counsel. He had the hope and promise of being received into glory. How could the things of this world ever compensate for such blessings? Contrasting the end of the wicked with the end of the righteous, the reward of this world seemed so paltry, and "the toil of the road" seemed nothing; indeed, such a small price to pay for the reward God gives. Like Paul wrote, *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."*

He, not the wicked, had the real blessings. He had God, not only in heaven, but even here in this life. Though his flesh fail, though he be weak, though he seemed to have so little by worldly standards, God was his strength and his portion, a prosperity that could never vanish away.

Now He Knows

Therefore, he concludes, *"For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works."* (Verses 27,28).

Now he has made the full circle from certainty to doubt, and back to certainty again. Now he knows better than ever the truth that is good to them of a clean heart. Now he knows what really matters and counts in this life. No longer will he be deceived about the affairs of this world, or shaken by what seems to be the success of "those in the wrong." His faith is strong and he is certain in his trust in the Lord God.

Cannot we also be encouraged to serve God through the fair consideration of this Psalm? Can we see more clearly what should be the emphasis and priority in this life? Will we not be better able to see through the facade of worldly success as it seeks to blind us from seeing spiritual success?

In a world of instability and uncertainty, dispensing with doubt and recognizing what is certain can be a source of strength to one and all. We plead for everyone to live in security with confidence, holding firm and steadfast the faith of God.

* * * * *

Faith In God

Hebrews 11:6, *"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."*

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews has been tabbed as the Hall of Faith because so many are named, their deeds are recorded, and their faith led them to act the way they did. Their faith produced obedience to God. Such is the quality of saving faith. It is said of them, *"...the world was not worthy"* of them.

Verse one defines faith. *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."* Faith is founded on evidence, and provides assurance of the

reality and truthfulness even of things that are not tangible and visible. Faith includes trust and confidence in the heart of man of the spiritual realm. It will embrace confidence in the future , past, and present.

Essential

This lesson will center on three major truths that are affirmed in verse six. First, there is the absolute necessity of faith in order to be pleasing to God. To a person who is unconcerned about spiritual matters, this may not impress him. But there is coming a day when everyone, believers and unbelievers, will know there is more to the human being than his flesh and bones; more to life than the here and now; more than simply the physical realm, but there is also the spiritual realm.

There are several realities that we recognize as spiritual that are intangible and invisible, such as mind, thought, ideas, values, hopes, etc. It is the utmost folly to deny the existence of the spiritual just because one cannot see it, measure it in a test tube, weigh it on a scale, or handle it with his hands. In this spiritual realm there is God. *"God is a Spirit..."* (John 4:24). There is much concerning God that is revealed in Scripture. The Bible is the book that shows the relationship between God and man. Man is subject to God and accountable to God. Without faith, there is no way open to man to be acceptable to God. Faith is essential.

Reality of God

Second, we must believe in the existence of God, *"that he is."* God is not imaginary, but a reality. We believe in the existence of God because of the evidence of His existence. Those who would accuse us of simply following an ancient superstition have not considered the reasons why we are confident of the existence of God. The Bible furnishes much evidence of God, but some reject the testimony of the Bible. But they are *"without excuse,"* for their disbelief, because God has furnished us tangible evidence of His existence. True enough, we cannot know the nature of God, our duty to God, our relationship with God, the commands of God, and many other things relating to God without the Word of God. But our very

world furnishes us evidence irrefutable that God exists. It is reasonable to believe while unbelief is unreasonable in light of this evidence.

Even those who deny the existence of God have faith and confidence in something, if nothing more than their own thoughts. Why should it be considered unreasonable to believe in God while others believe in their own ideas? We do not take a "blind leap into the dark" to conclude that God exists. Nor does God expect us to believe that way. For this reason He has provided us that which appeals to the mind, the intellect, the ability to discern the information we already possess to know **God is.**

Whose "faith" is the most reasonable, logical, sensible, and harmonious with tangible evidence, the faith of the atheist who denies God, or the faith of the Christian who accepts the existence of God? For one to be so confident that there is no God he would have to know everything, lest the one thing he did not know was, God is. The atheist has no evidence to support his contention. He would have to be everywhere to know there is no God lest the one place where he was not could be where God is. He would have to become as God to know God could not be.

For every result there must be a cause. The universe exists. It had to come from something. No explanation that man can offer for the existence of the universe can escape the necessity of the First Cause. Matter has not always existed, and science has proven that as a fact. Mind exists; matter exists. Matter has not always existed. Which existed first? Where is any evidence that matter can produce mind? But the explanation that God, Mind, the First Cause, brought the world into being harmonizes with the facts of the case.

An Accident?

One of the most nonsensical and unreasonable positions one can take with respect to our world is to suggest that this intricate, precise, detailed, immense universe, with its interdependent systems, just happened accidentally, without purpose, intent, or design. One can see the design of our world. That cannot be disputed. There must be a

designer. To think that the present world could have come to pass by chance, hit-or-miss processes is beyond reason and experience. Nothing can be shown to substantiate such a claim. Even yet, mankind, in all of his genius and wisdom, cannot explain the origin and existence of life without there first being life from the start. Science can prove that life comes from life, and has proven it over and over. Never has there been evidence that life comes from non-life, which one must accept if he denies the reality of God.

But this lesson is not intended to explore the many evidences God has given. But these are mentioned to underline the essentiality of faith, and that one must believe in the reality of God.

Rewards

Third, we are also expected to believe that God rewards those who diligently seek Him. Is not this reasonable? We are not to look for His rewards apart from our faith in Him. The seeking must precede the reward. It must be a diligent, earnest, careful, sincere, and industrious seeking to know the truth regarding God to be the recipient of God's spiritual blessings. This truth affirms God's concern for mankind and His desire to bless us. *"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works."* (Matthew 16:27). Why should it be thought strange that there is a reason for life? Is it reasonable to think that good and evil would accomplish the same results? What would be the purpose of life if there was nothing at the end of it but the grave, regardless of how well or sordidly life had been lived? Is there no such thing as justice and fairness?

Man cannot find his way through life by leaning on his own wisdom. He must rely on the direction and instruction from Him who has created all things. It is sensible to expect the Creator to take notice of those who follow His will, and those who determine they will not.

Yes, we believe God is concerned, and has provided for us. We believe in the power of prayer, or else we would not utilize it. There would be no cause for prayer if there

is no God. But we believe because evidence demands we believe. God rewards those who believe.

These three unshakeable truths are included in Hebrews 11:6. (1) It is necessary to believe in God. (2) We must have confidence in the existence of God. (3) There is reward for the believer.

The Kind of Faith

In this Hall of Faith of Hebrews eleven we see the nature of the faith which is taught. It is an active, responsive, submissive, obedient faith that works. It is not just a mental acceptance of certain truths. It demands doing the will of the One in whom we profess to believe.

Faith is a way of knowing. Men can know things through experience, or by empirical evidence. Men can also know things by logical reasoning from the evidence before them. One does not have to experience a thing before he can really know it. In fact, faith based on evidence is more reliable than that which is based on experience because one does not always comprehend and understand his experiences. He often draws false conclusions from them. The evidence cited in God's Word and world is sufficient to convince any honest mind that will investigate that evidence of the truthfulness concerning faith, even that of Hebrews 11:6.

* * * * *

How Do You Read Mark 16:16?

Coming to worship on Sunday morning we see people going separate ways. Some obviously have no intention of worshipping God in any fashion. They plan to stay at home, go boating, fishing, swimming, traveling, working or shopping. Others give the appearance of going to assembly somewhere with somebody to worship God. But even these go different directions, to different churches,

believing different things, practicing different forms. If all follow the same Bible, and believe in the same God, expect to be saved by the same Christ, why cannot they worship together?

Some explain that people cannot see the Bible alike, or interpret it differently. We need to be careful with such explanations lest we place the blame for the division and confusion on God. The Bible was authored by Deity. Is He the fault for religious division? Did He give us a Bible that commands unity, but that prevents it? First Corinthians 13:34 denies God is the author of confusion. If people **cannot** see the Bible like, would not that make God the one to be blamed?

Understand Alike

Not only can people understand the Bible alike, it is impossible to understand it differently. One may understand, the other misunderstand, and division result. Both may misunderstand differently and divide. But when both understand, they will be united, or else God and His Bible are at fault.

To interpret something means to get its meaning. God's Word does not have contradictory meanings. When two people get the meaning, they will be together. Otherwise, the division is God's fault.

Religious division and confusion exists because people have added to the Bible, taken from it, injected their own doctrines, followed human traditions, accepted the views of preachers, teachers, clergymen, theologians, and religious doctors, rather than *"thus saith the Lord."* What people ought to do is take God's Word and take God at His Word. Many times division is caused because people do not read what God has said. They do not wish to hear the truth. To demonstrate this, let us consider one passage, Mark 16:16.

"He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." This is not a difficult passage, yet there is hopeless division over it, but without justification. People do not hear what God has said.

Not Be Saved

Some read the passage, "He that believeth and is baptized shall **not** be saved." Who does that? The atheist, agnostic, infidel, humanist, any and all who deny the reality of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the inspiration of the Bible, sin, heaven, hell, eternity, including the need for salvation. They have no use for anything revealed in Scripture except to criticize it and attempt to find fault with it. That number seems to be growing. This is why you have more and more people going boating, fishing, working, etc. at worship hour. Such people have never and will never contribute to the moral and spiritual welfare of mankind because they have no basis for such things. Therefore, faith and baptism are meaningless to them. Salvation is foolishness. They do not believe anybody will be lost or saved because they think this life is all there is and when it ends, that is the complete end. But please take note that their scoffing does not remove the evidence for the very things they deny, nor does it alter the passage one syllable.

Believe Not

Some read, "He that believeth **not** and is baptized shall be saved." Who would do that? Roman Catholics and all others who "baptize" infants do this because they believe infants are born guilty of sin. They actually do not baptize them, but only sprinkle them and call it baptism. Baptism is a burial (Romans 6:3,4; Colossians 2:12). The very word, *baptizo*, means to plunge beneath, submerge, bury. In the Bible baptism included going into the water, coming out of the water. But these people sprinkle infants who cannot believe. They will even practice their rituals over unconscious unbelievers, even unborn children. But faith must precede baptism, according to the Bible.

The doctrine that children are born guilty of sin, and totally depraved, is not from the Bible, but from confused religious minds. The soul that sins must bear responsibility, but the child has done no sin, nor is capable of being responsible (Ezekiel 18:20). Jesus used the child as an example of those in His kingdom (Matthew 18:4; 19:4). Why would Jesus want us to enter

His kingdom and be like a child if that child is depraved and lost? The doctrine of inherited sin is brutal, makes God unfair and unjust, condemns helpless children spiritually because of his foreparent's violations of God's law. Descendants may well suffer many consequences of foreparent's sins, but the guilt of sin is not one of them. He is not yet accountable. He is safe and will remain so until he partakes of evil himself.

Baptizing or sprinkling unbelievers, either one, cannot change Mark 16:16. Every example of conversion to Christ concludes with baptism. The doctrine of "baptismal regeneration," that the power is in the water, or even the act of baptism, is not Biblical. The power is the blood of Christ that saves. But one is baptized to reach that blood (Romans 6:3,4).

Not Baptized

Some read, "He that believeth and is **not** baptized shall be saved." Who would dare rewrite God's Word this way? Those who teach salvation by faith only, which includes most Protestant denominations who omit baptism for salvation in spite of Mark 16:16. To them baptism is optional, not even necessary, just the first act of obedience after being saved, or a ritual to join some denomination.

Contrast that with what Scripture teaches. Peter commanded baptism (Acts 10:48). Is his apostolic command optional? He said, "*Baptism doth now also save us.*" (First Peter 3:21). Was he wrong? Did he really mean it? He also commanded, "*Repent and be baptized... for the remission of sins...*" (Acts 2:38). Why did he include baptism if it was unnecessary? Why did Ananias command Saul of Tarsus to be baptized and wash away his sins, if baptism has nothing to do with washing away sins? (Acts 22:16). Over and over there are references directing people to be baptized to be saved. If optional, why?

Please note that Jesus did not put that "not" in the passage like "faith only " people do. Jesus made belief **and** baptism conditions of salvation. Wonder why they don't? In fact, every passage in the New Testament where

baptism and salvation, or its equivalent, appear, baptism always comes first. Does this not mean anything to us? To remove baptism from God's plan to save man demands that we take away from His Word, and deny it is true. That is a serious mistake to commit.

Some Accept What Christ Said

There are those who say, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.*" Who would do that? Everybody that teaches what Jesus taught does that. Mark 16:16 is as simple to grasp as two plus two equals four. Faith plus baptism equals salvation. While this is not the whole plan, as far as the relationship of faith and baptism is concerned, our Lord made one as essential as the other. It is not that people cannot see it alike. Some are not even looking at it. Others are not listening. Many are not hearing what the Lord said at all because men have changed it to suit their own ways, and their own peculiar denominational dogmas.

But say cry, "Jesus did not say that you would be condemned if you were not baptized." The last part of the verse does not include baptism, does it? Why be surprised at that. The last part of the verse discusses being damned. To be damned, all you have to do is not believe. Those who do not believe will not be concerned about repentance, confession, baptism, or anything else. Nothing matters to them until they believe the gospel. But if you believe the gospel you will not want to be damned, but saved. To be damned, just don't believe. That will take care of your damnation.

But if you want to be saved you must meet the conditions of salvation Jesus spoke. When people do that, follow what the Lord taught in Mark 16:16, and the rest of the counsel of God teaching the conditions of salvation, they shall be recipients of God's spiritual blessings. Until they do obey, they will remain lost.

* * * * *

Delayed Discipline Costs Souls

We must always be cautious that disciplinary action is not taken too hastily. Measured judgment must be exercised lest great and unnecessary harm be created by acting too quickly. However, the error brethren usually make is one of acting too slowly, or, in many cases, not at all.



JAMES W. BOYD

For whatever reason, the usefulness of discipline to recover the lost is voided by needless delay. Hearts become hardened, issues clouded, sentiments aroused, and sin appears tolerated, thereby leaving the church open for reproach, keeping the church defiled, and, most seriously, failing to win the fallen home again.

God expects His will to be obeyed, not rendered ineffective by procrastination and negligence.

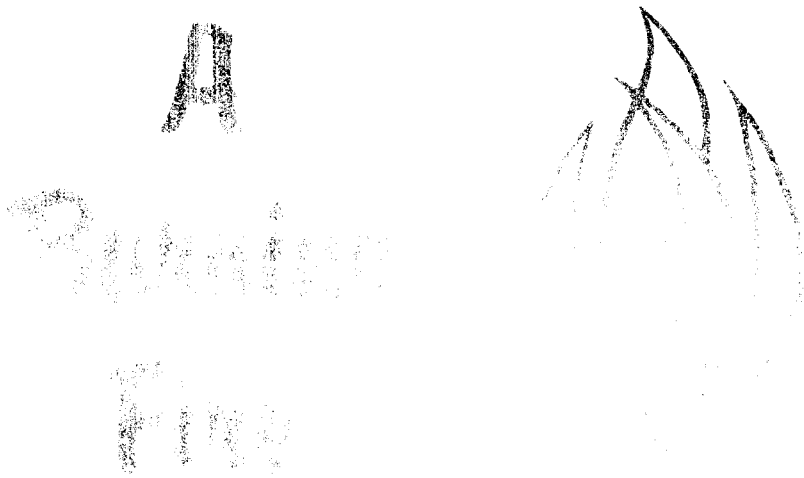
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*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*

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Why Does God Allow Suffering?

"The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see. O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! Why dost thou show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me, and there are that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth; for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth." (Habakkuk 1:1-4).

The prophet is asking the same question basically that all have asked. Why does evil persist? Why do people have to suffer in this life? Why does God not stop it all? Does God not care that the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? Why is there war, disease, pain, and injustice?

Few matters are more real to the human being, and at the same time, more frustrating and puzzling than this matter of human suffering. Why does God allow it? These matters have provoked people to misunderstand God altogether. Men have said unkind and untrue things about God. They have accused Him of injustice, cruelty, and unconcern. Some have become frustrated and bewildered that they have rejected God, even denied He exists. They ask, "If God is good, why does He allow what so many must endure?" Too often people fail to see that more is involved in suffering than the existence of God.

It is no difficulty for any one of us to list innumerable fashions of human suffering, and we shall not belabor that matter. It is too well known for us to question. We see the suffering not only of the wicked, which might have some explanation on the grounds that they are receiving their

just due. But do we not also see the suffering of the righteous, even the innocent, and the young? Do we not ask, "Why?"

We Have Limitations

As we approach this study, let us pray we do so cautiously, being aware that we are finite creatures and have limitations, even in our capacity to understand some things. Is there any promise or guarantee that we shall understand all that this life offers? Are we to dash to bits what we can know because of those things that we might not ever know? Would that be the mark of wisdom? We persuade it would be folly to take such a position.

Let us not assume that we can fully understand this problem of human suffering. We do ourselves justice to recognize our limits of knowledge and understanding all that exists and takes place in this vast world. Can we even presume to fully satisfy ourselves with an answer, let alone satisfy all others? We do not know all of God's ways, but only know those that He has seen fit to reveal. We have not knowledge of all His goals, purposes, designs, and the manners by which He accomplishes what He desires. He has oversight over His creation, but just how He exercises it all we dare not pretend to know.

But our caution must extend to asking, "Do we have the right to question God as to why He does what He does, or allows what He allows?" We should not pursue this matter as if we are putting God on trial, or as if He owes us explanation. If we ask such a question as we are asking, let our motive be only to enlarge our understanding of what is apparent around us so we might have sufficient courage and knowledge to bring glory to His name.

Many have answered the question regarding human suffering in very, very misleading and wrong ways. Some have suggested that suffering is only an illusion, only in the mind, but not real. Such is like the philosophy of Christian Science. This is totally unrealistic. It does not answer the problem, but ignores it. While we are aware that there are functional disorders, mentally induced, certainly this is not true of every ill and suffering experienced by the human family. When a man has lost a

leg, he is not merely imagining it is lost. When a father upon whom many depend dies, the hardship imposed is not merely in the mind. It is real. Death, disease, loss, and pain are real to life. Such an disposition of suffering is foolishness.

The Result of Sin

Some say that suffering is the result of sin. This is so true that we are inclined to let the matter rest with that. But this does not give us the whole answer, because some, such as infants who have not sinned, also suffer. With the transgression of the first pair, sin entered the world (Romans 5:12). Sin has from that time until this been the most crucial problem mankind faces whether he is aware of that fact or not. But there is much more that can and must be said if our understanding is to be enlarged very much. While this answer is on the right path, it is not yet adequate. But while we may not fully answer the question, there is much more revealed to us that provides us sufficient understanding and comfort amidst suffering than simply to explain it as the result of sin.

The Innocent Suffer

We all have seen the innocent suffer. The Biblical record presents this as well as our experiences in life. Job was accused by his *friends* of having sinned, and offered that as their explanation for his hardships. But we know that was not why he suffered. He was being subjected to temptation to test his faith in God, not because he was being punished for his sins.

Jesus taught, *"There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that those Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."* (Luke 13:1-5). It was not because of their personal sins that these hardships befell those people.

Again, *"And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him saying, Master, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him."* (John 9:1-3). Obviously, the innocent suffered, but not because of personal sins, even though sin was in the world. So the broad and unqualified answer that suffering is due to sin only goes part of the way.

Some have even suggested that the devil is more powerful than God. But that defies all we can learn about God. The three Hebrew children, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said, *"God is able to deliver us."* (Daniel 3:17). *"All things are possible with God."* (Matthew 19:26). Did not the Son of God amply demonstrate His power over Satan while on earth during His ministry in driving out demons, raising the dead, healing the sick, even conquering death and the grave Himself? God is not powerless before the power of Satan. But this leads us toward an explanation that offers considerable assistance to us. The explanation for human suffering rests upon one or two fundamental Biblical principles of which we can be sure.

God is Limited

This first principle may surprise you, even startle you. It may sound contradictory at first, but it is not. God is limited only because He has limited Himself. He is not limited by Satan, man, or any other force greater than He. He has limited Himself by His own will and His own laws which He has set in motion and operation. He is limited by the very nature of His character. His laws and character make it impossible for Him to do some things. For instance, God cannot lie (Hebrews 6:18). This would violate His very nature. He cannot be tempted with evil (James 1:13). He cannot look upon evil with approval (Habakkuk 1:13). He could not do such things with consistency to the Being He is. This is not a contradiction to the affirmation that all things are possible with God. This is within His own prescription pertaining to what He says He will and will not do. The very limitations He has imposed on Himself is an exercise of His limitless power?

We quite naturally ask, "Why has God limited Himself?" Again, let us be sure we ask for the purpose of understanding rather than doubting the will of God for Himself or for us. God has made man a creature of freedom, with the power of choice, a free moral agent. To be sure, God has decreed that man must enjoy or suffer the results of his choices. But God has made man to bring glory unto God. Man is to honor God. How else could man honor God except by his own choice? Would it be an honor to God if God forced man to honor Him? Man is not a mere robot, already programmed for everything he says, does, thinks, chooses, etc. Man is a free creature of choice. Therefore, God has limited His own intervention into the affairs of man in order to allow man to make his choices. God limits Himself to let man be man. Otherwise man would be less than what God created him to be. We suggest that God has limited His intervention in the matter of suffering because it would prevent man from fully exercising his powers, and experiencing the consequences. As man is, he can rightly use his powers and fulfill his duty in life to honor and glorify God.

There Are Laws

God has established certain laws, physical and spiritual. If man violates those laws he brings suffering upon himself. Galatians 6:7,8, *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked. For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."* Has not this been demonstrated in nature, in the history of man, in the ways of Israel, even in our own lives? Who can doubt the truthfulness of this principle? In order to bless man, God established certain laws that produce blessings when observed and obeyed with respect. But when those same laws are violated, they bring suffering. We can illustrate this with the law of gravity. We all know the blessings involved in that law. But should one defy that law, like casting himself over a cliff, can he expect no harm to befall him? This goes a long way in explaining why much of the suffering of man exists. He trespasses established laws that are intended for man's good. It is similar to the fact that Jesus came to save, but those who reject Him shall be lost. The gospel saves, but it also condemns those who submit not to it.

All Suffering Is not Evil

Let us understand, that while suffering is due to sin, all suffering is not, of itself, something evil. This has been difficult for people to see, but upon examination we can clearly see that this is true. Furthermore, all suffering is not due to one's personal sins. Often it is because of the sins of others than a person suffers. There are those situations we might at first consider to be good and beneficial that can actually be harmful hindrances. How many have perished on the rocks of riches? Some falter on fame. Others plummet to the bottom when they obtain power and honors. While on the other hand, what is sometimes considered loss proves to be a blessing in disguise. It depends to a great extent on our attitude toward such things, and how we handle them. The rich fool of Luke twelve thought himself doing fine, but his wealth cost him his soul. The list is long of those whose prosperity destroyed them. The list is also long of those who rose above their hardships to reach heights they would not have otherwise reached except through the challenge of their adversities.

Is it not true that when a man is down he is more likely to look up to the Lord, more inclined to consider more than the here and now, and give eternity greater consideration? Sometimes illness has proven better than health, and poverty more blessed than riches. Death has been a blessing to many rather than a continued life on earth.

In my acquaintances of the past was a man that seemingly could not be reached with the gospel. Not until he was smitten with cancer did he turn his thoughts to the life beyond. On his death bed he told me that his cancer proved to be one of the greatest blessings he ever had because it took away his false security, and made him think of things more important. He died in Christ a saved man.

Suffering as a Blessing

Suffering can be a blessing. When Moses made the choice of enduring the affliction with the people of God rather than enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season, he suffered. But it was ultimately to his profit. *"For which cause we faint not, but though out outward man perish, yet*

the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." (Second Corinthians 4:16,17). Facing tragedy, loss, catastrophe, setbacks, and various disappointments, things that once seemed so important do not remain so important. Suffering helps us keep things in perspective, and maintain proper priorities. The "*thorn in the flesh*" suffered by Paul was designed to keep him humble, and recognize his dependence on God. We dare not become to self-sufficient in our own eyes that our pride leads us away from God.

"For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." (Hebrews 12:6). When God chastens us He is dealing with us as sons for our own profit. While for the time it is difficult, ultimately, it bears fruit for our benefit. David wrote, "*It is good that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.*" (Psalm 119:71). When we see the physical things around us to be as they really are, temporal and unstable, we realize more than ever the value of the soul and the importance of salvation.

Suffering can develop us into a blessing for others as a source of comfort. *"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."* (Second Corinthians 1:3,4). We have heard the phrase, "Saved to save." It is also true that we are comforted to comfort others. When you have stood where others have to stand you can sympathize, and comfort them like you otherwise could not do if you have never suffered yourself.

Suffering helps us to build character. James tells us it helps to build patience (James 1:2-4). Peter tells us it helps to build a strong faith (First Peter 1:6,7). How else can we learn of our own real quality if we are never put to the test? If God provided us immunity from all suffering, would we learn to serve Him out of love, the highest motive, or merely from self-interest to escape the unpleasant things of life? *"Yea, and all that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."* (Second Timothy 3:12). We are not promised heaven on earth. We can use suffering to

provoke us to seek heaven all the more. God has promised us a safe harbor, but not a calm sea.

People can and do suffer because of their personal sins. Sometimes we suffer because of the sins of others. We do influence one another (Romans 14:7). The drunkard suffers because of his own sins. His family also suffers. The sins of parents hurt the parents, but also hurt the children, even though the children are not guilty of those sins. Because we live among people we see the innocent suffer because of the waywardness of the guilty.

All Suffering Cannot be Removed

We are not capable of removing all suffering just as we are incapable of removing all evil. But we must keep our attention on the destiny of the soul that flesh and blood cannot inherit. We dare not follow the foolish advice that Job's wife gave him, "*Curse God, and die.*" (Job 2:9). These things are a part of human existence. Paul once wrote, "*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer (permit, JWB) you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*" (Second Corinthians 10:13). There are those things that are "*common to man.*"

But God has promised His children they can overcome and/or endure whatever befalls them. This verse teaches that whatever happens this day, God and I together can handle it. This is easier to say than to live, but it is the truth. God cares for us (First Peter 5:7). "*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble.*" (Psalm 46:1). We have been assured that there is a place called heaven awaiting the redeemed (John 14:1-4).

Romans 8:28 is also a passage of assurance. "*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose.*" This does not teach that everything that happens is good. This has primary reference to what God has done for man. What God works is for our good. There are those things that work for our harm. But if we stay with the Lord, we can conquer that which opposes us, and would destroy us.

As we are called upon to suffer, we must remember that suffering was no stranger to Christ. He suffered for sins (First Peter 3:1), although not His own sins (Hebrews 4:15). He suffered the humiliation heaped against Him even as He sought man's salvation. He suffered on Calvary, and knew body pain and heartache. His suffering was in order that we might be glorified, even if we do have to suffer while we live here on earth. Paul stated a great conclusion, *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."* (Romans 8:18). Such assurances give hope and comfort to those who are the children of God.

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How Shall the Young Secure Their Hearts?

We confront many questions, but few more serious than the one of this lesson. Some questions deal with trivial things and can be easily answered and even if answered incorrectly, the matter is not overly serious. Other questions are more difficult and far-reaching. The answers are not only of temporal concern, but eternal consequence. Such is the question regarding the young.

It is not sufficient to find the answer for just one generation, but something that will be applicable for every generation of youth. We ought not think that the answer varies from one generation to the next. But we must be impressed that every generation must have God's answer.

Why is this such an important matter? To secure means to make confident, free from doubt and fear, to provide comfort and certainty so there can be stability. This is so needful because the devil and all of his forces and agents are busy trying to destroy the souls of the young. If they cannot be secured, they can be destroyed. If those who can assist the young to secure their hearts do not do it,

Satan will see to it that they shall be overcome. When the young person is your child, you can see the seriousness of it all the more.

There are those intent on destroying faith in God and the Bible as His Word. They plant doubt, constantly sowing seeds of confusion in order to uproot confidence. Satan wishes to undermine the foundation for life that God prescribes in order to prevent the person from fulfilling his mission and purpose in life. The forces of evil seek the instability and uncertainty in the hearts of people because that kind of heart is ripe for the sowing of the seeds of temptation that produces sin.

The Right Foundation

Neither the old nor the young can build on a foundation of sand and withstand the inevitable challenges that come in life. They will become *"like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed."* (James 1:6). Paul urged his brethren to strive for perfection and told them why. *"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive."* (Ephesians 4:14). Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica to work among the brethren *"to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith, that no man should be moved by these afflictions."* (First Thessalonians 3:2,3). The need of stability is repeated over and over.

We are taught to be secure and steadfast in order to receive the eternal blessings of God. First Corinthians 15:58, *"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."* In a world overrun with confusion, threats, violence, hate, and skepticism, where material things of life are proved to be unstable and temporary, with pressures to do evil pounding us on every turn, young people need an anchor for the soul that is sure and steadfast, or else they will perish with the wickedness of the world. Sin destroys, and the young must be equipped to guard against it, avoid it, prevent it, and if overcome by it, seek forgiveness that God has provided. This is a most crucial matter and we must come to grips with it.

A Secure Heart

The heart of the youth must be made secure. No person, young or old, is going to continue to do wrong, but will seek that which is right, when from within comes the determination to do right. In the early years of life, parents are able to restrict, restrain, and control the child from much evil. This they ought to do. But the time soon comes that parental restraint is not sufficient because the child must gradually assume responsibility for his own actions. He will soon be outside the watchful eye of parents. He must do right because he knows to do right, and wants to do right. Each person must learn to discipline himself. Inasmuch as behavior stems from the heart, when the heart is made secure, and is on guard against sin, then the life is secure. The securing of the heart does not just happen, however. There is no magic formula, and it cannot be done by mere wishful thinking and hoping. Nor will it likely to be done by the young person left to stand totally for himself. It takes the combined effort of parent and child, working together. Even though it begins entirely with the parents, gradually, but certainly, it will continue as the child learns to control himself.

Parents

We want to suggest four efforts by which the heart of the young can be made secure. First, the parent must provide guidance. Fathers and mothers must set the standards by word and example. *"Train up a child in the way he should go..."* is directed primarily toward parents (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). *"He that spareth his rod, hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes."* (Proverbs 13:24). The level and content of guidance to be given the child is determined from the Word of God.

By proper instruction, showing the good, restraining the evil, with love, consideration, provision, discipline, and chastisement, the older is to guide the younger. By example, which is more powerful than words, the child can formulate his values, his concept of right and wrong, his duty and privileges of life. When word and example are lacking, or misdirected, the child's heart is not likely to

ever be secure regarding that which is most important to him. The devil will move in and lead that precious youth into a life that eventually leads him to hell.

Responsibility

Second, there comes the time when the child must assume more and more responsibility for his own life. He must do his own study (Second Timothy 2:15), and not be content to live according to a borrowed faith, a faith accepted just because somebody told him what to believe. When a young person has convictions that are true to God's Word, his convictions will be like those of his parents, provided all convictions are true to God's Word. This idea that the young must necessarily have a different view from his foreparents is fallacious. But one must know the truth because he knows the truth from the source of truth.

There are many things others can do for another. There are things we can help each other to do. But there are some things each one must do for himself. Young people must learn the truth of the Bible, give heed to the revelation therein, exert their own effort to know and do the will of God. As they gradually assume greater freedom and independence from parents, a mark of real maturity is that they accept this responsibility with seriousness. The combination of parental guidance and the acceptance by the youth of his own responsibility will contribute to securing the heart of the young.

Companions

A third area where it takes combined effort of parent and child cooperation is in the associations of the young. Many young people are led into evil ways by the influence of their peers. Too often, not having reached sufficient maturity to make up their own minds properly and follow the right ways, for fear of being excluded, they will follow the crowd, going places, doing things, saying things that they think will make them acceptable by their associates, but are damaging to their spiritual welfare.

In view of this reality, it is startling to see how indifferent some parents are in what they allow their children to do in cultivating friends and associates. Little wonder that some

young people seek the world before they seek the Lord. All of their friends act that way. We are so inclined to blame the faults of our children on his friends, but have we given proper consideration of our own permissiveness relating to whom they have as friends? It is essential that people develop the right kind of friends.

First Corinthians 15:33, "*Be not deceived; evil companionships corrupt good morals.*" (ASV). Proverbs 13:20, "*He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.*" Proverbs 28:7, "*He that is a companion of riotous men shameth his father.*" In the song where we admonish each other to "yield not to temptation," we sing a phrase, "shun evil companions," We sing, "Take time to be holy," and urge one another to "Make friends of God's children." The kind of people whose close association we cultivate will have an influence on us. For this reason parents and youth need to be very cautious in the selection of friends. There is value in situations where Christian association can be nurtured. Friends can help or hinder one in his Christian life.

Opportunity

Fourth, our young must be given opportunity to apply Christianity in their lives **now**. They should be encouraged to abstain from the evil, but they must be encouraged to do the positive good that is expected of a child of God. Sometimes people speak of the young as the church of tomorrow. Many young people are already a part of the church of today. They must be taught to exercise their sense of right and wrong as they have learned from Scripture. Decisions must be made by them to the extent they are capable. The ability to discern between right and wrong is gradually developed with growth like every other part of Christianity. Learning to serve, to give of oneself for others, to be included in the work and worship of the body, are things that must be provided for the young. They will not likely push themselves in such things, but may well have to be pushed. But it is the duty of the older to see that they have this opportunity. Only then can they grow to be like Jesus who went about **doing** as well as saying good.

The way of youth often is very frustrating to both young and older. This has been true with every generation, and it

will continue to be true. But God, through His Word, has revealed to us how the young must secure their hearts, and how it can be accomplished. When there is the right combination of proper parental oversight, with the youth gradually assuming his place and duty, the church teaching and encouraging everyone in the way they should walk, the young will grow strong in the Lord and be able to resist the devil who would harm them, now and forever.

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Satan's Compromises

Second Corinthians 2:11, "*Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.*"
Ephesians 6:11, "*Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.*"

Paul warns his brethren of Satan's devices and wiles, which are his methods and maneuvers to deceive and mislead. Just as the Christian is provided an arsenal of weapons with which to fight the good fight of faith, so Satan has many weapons also which he uses to capture precious souls and retain them in spiritual bondage.

John mentions the devil's avenues of temptation in First John 2:15 as the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. He also uses false doctrines, difficulties of life, disappointments, hypocrisy among those who profess to be Christians. He uses every means to create doubt, and encourage people to postpone doing what they ought to do, or turn away from the righteous things they have done.

The Weapon of Compromise

Another device that is not always so easily detected is Satan's use of compromise. Compromising the truth is mixing it with error, retaining enough truth to appeal, but containing enough error to condemn. It is like mixing sugar and sand. What there is that seems good is no longer of use because it is contaminated with what is detrimental. The use of compromise is a gradual,

deceptive mechanism to render the hearts and minds of people insensitive toward truth and willing to accept error.

We have an Old Testament demonstration of the use and appeal of compromise in the negotiations between Moses and Pharaoh. We see how the tool of compromise works, and we also can see how the devil uses it even yet.

God's requirements were expressed by Moses, but Pharaoh offered a number of compromises, each one falling short of what God required. He offered counter proposals, substitutes, something less than and different from the required. God sent Moses to lead Israel from Egypt. He required a complete departure. "*Let my people go,*" was the command. All of the Israelites were to leave and never return, taking all of their possessions with them. Pharaoh's response to this command was, "*Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go.*" (Exodus 5:2).

Moses persisted with the Lord's instructions, but Pharaoh resisted. Egypt was subjected to a series of plagues that demonstrated the power of God over Egypt, Pharaoh, and all their false gods. Pharaoh began to relent just a bit under these pressures, and began to offer compromises. So it is with Satan. When he sees a person who seems determined to do what is right, and will not surrender to him, he will offer compromises and attempt to subvert that person in whatever way he can.

Just Sacrifice

God commanded that Israel be allowed to leave. Pharaoh proposed, "*Go ye, sacrifice to your God in the land.*" (Exodus 8:5). Israel could go and sacrifice, but they had to remain in the land. But nothing short of leaving the land altogether would suffice to obey God.

We must realize that God expects us, upon coming to Christ, to go all the way out of a life of sin, and not continue therein. Romans 6:1,2, "*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*" Read Second Corinthians 6:14-17. We cannot stay in the sinful world, a sinful state, and serve God at

the same time. We must decide who we shall serve. Evil habits, adulterous marriages, profanity, drunkenness, lies, lasciviousness, false doctrines, self-will, on and on, all must be abandoned

Don't Go Far

Seeing Moses refused his first offer, Pharoah tried again. *"I will let you go, that ye may sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; only ye shall not go very far away: intreat for me."* This was much like the first, but Pharoah realized that worshipping God in Egypt would be an abomination for the Israelites. So he would let them get just outside the border into the wilderness, but not far. His offer accommodated one objection, staying in the land, but did not accomplish God's direction to leave and not return.

This reminds us that Satan does not mind people leaving him just a little bit, so long as they stay within easy grasp. He does not mind people "going to church on Sunday," but he would prefer they did not. But surely he does not want you to be "fanatical" and attend every service. He does not mind you giving something now and then, but to give as you have been prospered, regularly, cheerfully, sacrificially, and in order to show love for God is too much. He might not mind you saying a prayer before a meal, but praying fervently, daily, earnestly is something he does mind. He does not even mind you getting involved in a few good works, so long as that does not become the goal in life. He objects to allowing the standards of Christianity be your guide.

God says that man is to sacrifice himself, be a living sacrifice, become bondservants to the Lord. But some are like the little boy who fell out of bed. When asked to explain how that happened, he answered, "I guess I went to sleep too close to where I got in." This may be the problem with many in the church today. They do not get "in" enough to keep them from falling "out." They are not sufficiently removed from their former works of evil. Peter described people like that in Second Peter 2:20-22.

Leave Your Families

The third compromise Pharoah offered to the unrelenting Moses was just another “blind” that failed. Moses said, *“We will go with our young and with our old, with our sons and with our daughters, with our flocks, and with our herds will we go.”* Pharoah countered, *“Not so.”* He would not allow them to take their families and possessions. He knew he could keep them if their families were left behind.

This is something the devil knows about us. When we profess to follow Christ, we cannot forget about our loved ones and be content to leave them behind. We must take our families with us. To be able to stand on that day at the right hand of the Great Judge and say, “Behold, here am I Lord; here also is my wife and the children which thou gavest me,” would be joy enough to fill the heart of any ransomed man.

Sometimes I have heard parents say, “I intend to leave it to my child to make up his own mind about church, church activities, God, his social life, friends, education, etc.” This is a strange and foreign attitude from what God expects of parents. Parents do not leave other matters of lesser nature totally to the child, such as eating properly, brushing the teeth, going to school, and similar matters. Eventually each one must decide for himself, but it is the divine duty of parents to see that the child has the proper material, instruction, and example by which to formulate an intelligent and righteous decision in favor of God and His righteousness. The child must be taught, guided, trained, disciplined, and not left to themselves. Without this oversight they will not even know the difference between right and wrong, and will have no basis upon which to make good decisions. God has provided parents for children for many reasons, and it is time for many parents to find out what they are. It was unthinkable to Moses and the Israelites to go to the promised land but leave their children in bondage. We have seen some parents, unable to take their children with them because the child rebels, and the parents turn around and return to bondage with them.

Leave Your Possessions

The fourth compromise offer from Pharoah was, *"Go ye, serve the Lord; only let your flocks and your hearts be stayed: let your little ones also go with you."* He gave a little bit more, but not enough for God's requirement to be met. He wanted them to leave their possessions because he knew they would return for them.

When one comes to God through Christ he must bring all that he has into the service of God. We are stewards of God's properties. What we have materially is not really our own, but we are caretakers for a while. We are not to think that only that which is placed in the collection basket at worship service is all that belongs to God, and the rest that we have is ours to do whatever we wish. We are accountable for it all. We ought not misuse anything that God has placed in our care and for honorable use.

There is the story of a man about to be baptized, and one reminded him to take his wallet out of his pocket. But he responded, "I think I had better give that to the Lord also." At least he had the right concept and attitude. We *"honor God with our substance."* (Proverbs 3:9). We cannot leave behind what God says to take with us.

Do you see how Pharoah backed away little by little, but never enough? Can you see how he tried to accommodate some of the demands, but not willing to do all, trying to negotiate a compromise with Moses?

"Let us go," Moses said. "Only worship in the land," was Pharoah's response. "We must leave the land completely," Said Moses. "Only don't go very far," said Pharoah. "We must take our families," said Moses. "Leave your children," answered Pharoah. "We must take our possessions," demanded Moses. "Leave your possessions," said Pharoah.

So went one compromise offer after another. The design behind each of them was to disobey God. Whenever Satan can get man to serve God only partially, which is not proper service, Satan has succeeded in his attempts to subvert man's soul. Only when we reject Satan's compromises can we please the Lord.

Let us not be “*ignorant of his devices,*” but alert to the subtle ways he manipulates. Let us not be content to serve the Lord only with half a heart, and deceive ourselves into thinking this will be enough. Obeying God is not like shopping at the supermarket where you take what you want and leave what you do not want. With God, it is service to Him with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. We must do as did Moses and let Satan know that we will not fall for his compromises.

* * * * *

Thankfulness

“Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord he is God; it is he that hath made us and not we ourselves; we are his people and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.” (Psalm 100).

In November of each year our nation observes a unique holiday called Thanksgiving Day. To my knowledge, with possibly one exception, we are the only nation to have such a day set aside for such a purpose. This celebration had its beginning around 1620, and has gradually become a national day of observance. The first such day was proclaimed in 1789. Quoting from one source as to how it began, Dr. Franklin says that in a time of great despondency among the first settlers of New England, it was proposed in one of their public assemblies to proclaim a fast. An old farmer arose, spoke of provoking heaven with their complaints, reviewed their mercies, and showed that, instead of appointing a day of fasting and complaint, they should appoint a day of thanksgiving. This was accordingly done, according to this source, and the custom has continued ever since.

Not a Holyday

We do not celebrate Thanksgiving Day as some special religious holyday, nor any other such day, because they are not authorized in Scripture. We must have authority for what we do religiously (Colossians 3:17). No day is special in and of itself. The first day of the week carries some distinction because on that day we are to assemble for worship, but it is the worship that is special, not the day, even though the first day is specified. But the idea of thanksgiving is a noble one and certainly like Christ, not only in the Fall Season, but throughout the year, every year.

Giving thanks is a very reasonable activity as well as a Biblical one. One wrote, "If an exhausted, weary, needy traveller should rest at the foot of a castle wall, and some one from the walls above dropped to him a supply for all his needs, could he keep from looking up to see who had relieved him? So it is not possible for a true Christian, who lives daily out of the alms-basket of God's providence, not to look with thankfulness to that Father who liberally supplies all his need."

Another has said, "An ungrateful man is like a hog under a tree eating acorns, but never looking up to see where they come from." We would contend that it makes good sense and good reason to be grateful. The ingrate is to be shunned because he had a despicable character.

But more significant than that, thankfulness is Biblical and Christlike. It is amazing how much the Bible says on this subject. Jesus is our example in offering thanks. On several occasions the Scriptures mentions where He raised His voice toward heaven and prayed a prayer of thanksgiving. *"At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, of Father, Lord of heaven and earth..."* (Matthew 11:25). *"And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me."* (John 11:41).

Offered Through Christ

We learn that thanksgiving is to be offered to God through the name of Christ. *"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus*

Christ." (Ephesians 5:20). The writings of inspiration by Paul are plentifully supplied with such expressions as, "*I thank God; God be thanked.*" Such is typical of Christian manners and respect to the source of blessings.

The Bible also mentions many things for which men have offered thanks. Nehemiah thanked God upon completion of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls (Nehemiah 12:31,40,46). Thanks was offered for food (Mark 8:6; Acts 27:35; First Timothy 4:3,4). Thanks was given in remembrance of God's holiness, mercy, and goodness (Second Chronicles 5:13). Paul gave thanks for His unspeakable gift of His Son (Second Corinthians 9:5). Other things mentioned in thanksgiving are the power of Christ, His rule and reign over His kingdom (First John 1:12). The reception of the Word by others, and good works done in the Lord were noted (First Thessalonians 2:13). Romans 7:25 offers thanks for deliverance from sin. First Corinthians 15:57 mentions victory over death and the grave. We are to be thankful for wisdom and power (First Corinthians 14:18); the triumph of the gospel (First Corinthians 1:4; Second Corinthians 2:14); for the conversion of others (First Thessalonians 2:13; Romans 6:17); for love, zeal, and faith exhibited by others (Acts 28:15); Romans 1:8; Second Thessalonians 2:13). Psalm 100 mentions the nearness of God, while Second Corinthians 1:11 and 8:16 thanks is offered for the supply of bodily wants and needs. After all, James teaches, "*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of light, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*" (James 1:17). Who could list all the things for which men have properly given thanks, and still should?

Frequently we read in Scripture exhortations to be thankful. "*O give thanks unto unto the Lord*" is found often in the Psalms, such as Psalm 136. The Psalmist also made resolutions to be thankful (Psalm 18:49; 30:12). In fact, we read where thanks was habitually offered by Daniel (Daniel 6:10). Sacrifices of thanksgiving are mentioned in Psalm 116:17).

Ingratitude

The opposite of being thankful is ingratitude. This is a detestable characteristic. One wrote, "Nothing more

detestable does the earth produce than an ungrateful man.” Men have described ingratitude with various analogies. One very fitting one is likening the ingrate to the Dead Sea that takes in the fresh waters of Jordan, makes them salty and bitter, and gives nothing but briny death to everything around it.

There is a story told about a soldier in a war in 1854 who was wounded in battle, fell into a ravine, was helpless and probably dying. The only one to see him fall was one of the enemy. But this enemy came to him, stooped over him, gave him water, bound up his wound, revived him, lifted him from the ravine, and signaled to the wounded man’s comrades where he was. When the helper rose to leave, the wounded man turned his weapon against him and killed him. Whether this is a true account I do not know. But it does illustrate the wretchedness of ingratitude.

When Paul was describing the worst sort of people, the most sordid and depraved kinds of humanity, among the things this inspired man listed was, “*Neither were they thankful.*” (Romans 1:21).

Is it not the attitude toward blessings that causes one to be thankful or to be an ingrate? Some consider blessings something only for which to ask, but never for which to give thanks. Some always expect to receive, but never give. Some take their blessings as a matter of course, nothing for which one should sense any obligation to the source of them. Some think that everyone receives blessings, “Why not me? I work hard and deserve them just as much as anybody else.” They consider their blessings as payment for what they do. Some are not thankful for what they have because they are so preoccupied with the possibility of losing it. Some grieve over what they have lost to the point they are never grateful for what they have. Even adults act like a child who cannot enjoy his ice cream cone due to fretting over being without one when he finishes it. Nothing among our earthly, physical, and temporal blessings shall remain for long anyway. How foolish not to enjoy them, and be grateful for them while they are ours to use to the glory of God!

Greed

Some are not thankful for their blessings because their greed makes them want more and more. Failing to be thankful is a mark of covetousness, which is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). Being malcontent because we do not have an abundance is ingratitude. Sufficiency is as adequate as an abundance. Half a loaf is better than no loaf. Rather than complaining for not having an abundance, true followers of Christ are thankful for even a small portion. After all, Christians have more and better blessings than anyone else because we not only have physical blessings, but spiritual blessings which are in Christ (Ephesians 1:3). How can you measure the worth of the forgiveness of sins, fellowship with Deity and the saved, hope of eternal heaven, blessings that none can take from us if we will only be faithful to God? How tragic that we would complain for not having more of the fleeting and passing things.

Blessings Come From God

But we realize with James that all blessings come from God. Our lives should be filled with thanksgiving and praise, making sure that our gratitude is genuine, sincere, and true, not only on a national holiday like Thanksgiving Day, but throughout our entire life. Even in times of adversity, holy men of God lifted their voices in praise. Even when persecuted and mistreated, early Christians gave God thanks they were counted worthy to suffer for His name (Acts 5:41). Let us always lift our voices in tune with the sentiments expressed by Job, *"The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord."* (Job 1:21).

With whom had you rather be compared? Luke 17:11-19, *"And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God. And fell down on his face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? There are not found that*

returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole."

In this record Jesus healed all ten, yet only one turned back to thank Him. To say, "Thank you," is to speak beautiful and noble words. To observe a day of thanks is a noble and admirable gesture. But the real way to say thanks to God is by the way we live day by day, from one Thanksgiving Day to the next.

Just as a physician judges the condition of a person's body by the way it functions, and not by the words a person may say about his condition, so God knows our gratitude, or lack of it, by the way we live, and not just by good words that we might say.

Let us therefore resolve in our hearts to possess the spirit expressed in Psalm 79:13, "*So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks forever; we will show forth thy praise to all generations.*"

How thankful we ought to be for God's plan for saving us, His gift of Christ, Christ's gift of His life, the gift of salvation, the revealed will by which we can live, and eventually enter eternal glory.

* * * * *

Permit me to mention once more the availability of my commentary on Romans.

System of Salvation

This is a 288 page commentary, hardback book, that I can send you for ten dollars (\$10.00), plus the expense of shipping which is two dollars (\$2.00). It can be useful to you in your study, and would be an excellent gift to others in whom you have special interest. Order from me, **James W. Boyd, Route 11, Box 90, McMinnville, TN, 37110. Thanks!**

Next Issue:
Standing in the Old Paths

Faithful brethren are familiar with the plea to stand in the old paths, Jeremiah 6:16. It has been the persuasion of faithful brethren that we all should return to the New Testament as our pattern and guide. In recent days we have heard much about a so-called "new hermeneutics," a "new" approach to Scripture. Upon analysis, it is apparent that it is not new, but is as old a man's rebellion against God's Word. Alongside this "new" thing is the ridicule of following the old paths. It is said the New Testament should not be our pattern, and the plea to follow the old paths is irrelevant and foolish. Next issue we shall discuss in several lessons the importance of **Standing in the Old Paths**.



JAMES W. BOYD

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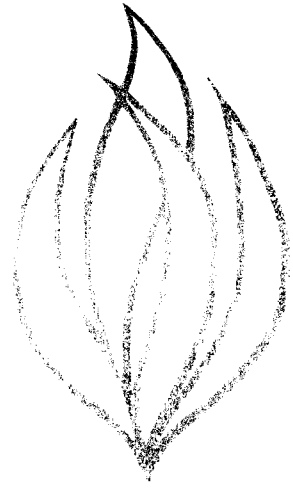
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"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).

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Standing in the Old Paths

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

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

What Some Are Saying

The following lessons, even though they are separated into four sections, should be considered as one major, overriding theme. One lesson builds upon the other. They must be taken as a unit in order to hear the plea. I want to stress the need for this theme and the reasons why we must stand in the old paths. We want to consider that in which we are to stand and how to stand.

We hear and read many statements today, both in and out of the church, that make such a study imperative. The attitude and actions being manifested by many toward the way of God is threatening and challenging. Some content, "Don't moralize on adultery, drunkenness, dishonesty, etc." We fail to understand this inasmuch as these things have to do with morality. "The question (regarding sex, JWB) is not if, but with whom and why," many youths are being told by their instructors and peers. "Nothing is spared from change. It is inescapable, therefore, that the Christian church (Christian used as denominations might use it, JWB) should be in process of change as radical and demanding as that of the so-called secular world." This kind of advice comes from some religious leaders. "Organized religion cannot escape change," we are told. We are also advised that it is right to only obey those laws you consider just, and that even physical violence may be morally justifiable to produce what some may consider to be desirable social change and reforms.

There are those who present the gospel as irrelevant to our times. "The church must listen to the world so that we can find out what language the world is using today,"

which means, so we can communicate a relevant message. We are informed that "Paul did not live in the twentieth century. He never spoke face to face with nuclear scientists or residents of Harlem. What language would he use if he tried to communicate with modern scientists? What would he quote if he addressed an audience in Harlem?"

The idea being pressed is obvious. Biblical language is inadequate to teach the world the gospel of Christ. We must get "with it," and convey spiritual things of God in "hip" terms. It is a slap at preaching that relies upon "*thus saith the Lord*" to communicate God's Word. It reflects contempt for the oracles of God (First Peter 4:11).

Even Brethren

Even brethren are writing without shame extolling the virtues of liberal thought, form criticism, existentialism, theistic evolution, and a religionless "Christianity." Youths are heard to say, aping their mentors, "Denominational preachers speak to me better than church of Christ preachers." They proclaim such doctrines as partaking of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week is of ourselves, not of God, and instrumental music in worship is just a matter of opinion. Some say the anti-instrument stand is a separatists "shibboleth." There are books coming from the presses denouncing what some call "Southern theology," because churches in the southern regions of the United States that have stood firm in the faith contend for that faith. It is a slash of snobbish ridicule by those who would run rough-shod over the truth, trying to make truth appear to be a sectional commodity. "Church of Christism" is the definition given to what we preach and teach by those who are set to restructure the church more akin to denominationalism. "Preach Christ, not the church," we are taught. On and on it goes with similar expressions that reflect a certain and definite departure from that which has characterized faithful gospel preaching for decades and centuries.

Is It New?

But are the cries of the liberal innovators and reconstructionists really new? Have their words not been heard before? We contend that those who scoff at the old

paths today are “Johnny-come-latelies” who are parroting worn out cliches that were proven false before they were born. They are but a part of the Satanic revival to discredit truth and plunge the church once again into spiritual digression and apostasy.

For instance, “It is the common conclusion among the more liberal and progressive brethren that the above-minded class (referring to the early efforts of restoration, JWB) have, for years past, been exhibiting a stubborn and perverse stupidity in reference to the progress of the age.

“Long since they became a real pest upon the body ecclesiastic, by standing directly in the way of those grand conceptions being realized which the more literary, refined, and charitable brethren have presented from time to time for adoption of the Christian brotherhood.

“It is really provoking to think that so many propositions for the adoption of means and practices intended to popularize our religious movement, and break down these distinctions between us and the other denominations which have to some degree united them in opposition to us, should be so stupidly and perversely opposed.” Such were words by Carl Crab, recorded in The Search for the Ancient Order, Volume II, page 136, back in 1872. So the clamor to make the truth palatable to denominations who hold error is not a new idea. The ridicule and denunciation, mockery and criticism of the old paths which rang loud and clear once before in the brotherhood once committed to the old paths is being heard again today. The words, attitudes, and actions of those malcontent with Scripture wounded what is called the Restoration Movement once before, and some today seek to destroy it now. That which brought liberal, digressive, and modernistic bodies into existence a century or so ago will produce the same disaster among us today.

But we contend that the same truth of the New Testament, the old paths, will produce children of God, Christians, the church of Christ today as it did in the days recorded in the New Testament. While some say it is useless to attempt to restore primitive Christianity, and would even desire it be done, those of greater respect for Scripture will subscribe to sentiments expressed in 1869 by Robert Graham (SftAO, page 132, Vol. 11), “...there is among ourselves a falling off from the simplicity of the gospel, a conforming to the mode of the ‘other’ denominations, the loss of zeal for the spread of the gospel

for fear people will think us solicitous only to build up a party, the decrease of Bible reading and study among us of late, the growing disposition to recognize the distinction of clergy and laity in our churches, and among much more that might be named, our conforming to the unscriptural phraseology of sects, to say nothing of our adopting many of their anti-scriptural customs. With the uniform experience of past ages before us, the tendency of men to make the gospel popular under the plea of extending its influence, and that, too, even at the cost of its purity and power to save, should make us keen to detect and fearless in our condemnation of all departures from the faith."

Now, as in the days of the Old Testament prophets who called men back to God, and in the days of men this side of the cross who urged a return to Scripture and the old paths, the plea for true New Testament Christianity as revealed in the Bible has been met with ridicule, indifference, snobbery, sophistication, with truth rejected for the intellectualism and doctrines of human wisdom. Yet, the need for man and the benefits for man still abide for the faith once delivered. That faith consists of the old paths to which we tenaciously hold, and without hesitation proclaim to friend and foe alike.

What is to Come

Part II will be a lesson on Isaac, who showed great wisdom in digging wells once dug by those who went before him. Part III is a study of attitudes we should have toward those who have attempted to restore Christianity in years gone by. Part IV will mention some of the major areas, certainly not all, that compose the old paths to which we must steadfastly turn and preach with fervor without compromise or alteration. May God add His blessings to these investigation.

* * * * *

PART TWO: ISAAC, DIGGER OF OLD WELLS

Genesis 26:18, *"And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham; and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them."*

This is the record of a historical event that contains the demonstration of great moral quality and value. Herein we find the path of great wisdom, and a reliable course of action. Isaac digged again the wells which his father Abraham had opened years before him. This lesson wishes to stress the action and draw from it.

Reasons for Digging

Why did he do this? There are at least three prominent reasons: (1) There was need for water. With his flocks, herds, people, and a famine in the land, he proposed to go to Egypt. But the Lord told him to stay in the land. He had to have water. (2) The Philistines, envying Isaac, had stopped the wells with stones and earth. If water was to be brought up, the wells had to be reopened. (3) He knew he could not improve on the location of those wells or the quality of water which flowed in their depths.

We need to heed the voice of history as it cries unto us. When we see the old paths of truth forsaken, we have to wonder why we should want to imitate the spiritual apostasy and failure this always produces. Do the liberals really think they are saying anything new or progressive? All of their derogatory prattle can be read in history almost verbatim in the tirades against the old paths uttered by the advocates of digression years ago. Modernism is not modern because it is the same age as the subtlety and deceit of Satan. Look where the descendants of digressives are today and see if you wish to give heed to the voices of liberalism and modernism. Are they not mired in the filth and scum of the rankest infidelity and spiritual adultery? Is this where we want to go, and lead our children?

Modernism, liberalism, digression, heresy, apostasy, whatever you wish to call it, is not a new battleground, but it continues to be a deadly and constant one. Salvation is not the prime task of the church according to apostates. The Bible cannot be understood alike they say. Clergymen of every stripe have drunk deep from the wells of intellectualism and infidelity until the

churches they serve no longer stand for much of anything holy.

Even the Lord's church has become burdened with many liberals who cherish theological and other kinds of academic degrees rather than the old paths, and who, at the same time, display contempt for the true in favor of something they think is new. It remains to be seen how many churches of Christ shall survive the onslaught of the professors, pastor-pulpiteers, presidents, and promoters of programs who are modern-day Philistines, busily engaged in filling the wells digged before us. If the sophisticated self-acclaimed "scholars" of many Bible departments prevail, the people of God will be led from Canaan to drink of the brackish waters of denominational Egypt rather than dig again and drink deeply from the wells of truth in which flows the water of life. Too many are too slow and too reluctant to recognize the sources from which detrimental digressive doctrines and evil influences are pouring into the ranks of the church.

Between Two Others

Isaac was a great man who lived between two other men who overshadowed him. They were Abram, his father, and Jacob, his son. Isaac was not an innovator, nor one to instigate great change. There was nothing particularly sensational, dramatic, or earth-shaking in his adult career. Whereas Abraham had left his home in Ur, and showed repeatedly his great faith from Moriah to the rescue of Lot, and before Melchizedek, and Jacob was a flamboyant, colorful character with one exciting and moving event after another from youth until death, Isaac simply carried on the great tradition of faith in God, and was a necessary link in the chain of divine purpose. Some are great for what they initiate. Others are great for what they preserve and keep alive. The latter was the greatness of Isaac who kept alive that which was deserving to be kept alive, and continued the march toward the coming Savior.

We should realize, as did Isaac, we owe a great debt of gratitude to those who have dug wells before us; wells from which we are privileged to drink and possibly do not appreciate as we should. When we drive through the countryside and see rows of tall and stately trees down a fence row, we wonder who planted them. We enjoy them, but the one who planted them probably never did see them

in their glory as we see them. We are indebted to those who have built bridges over chasms and rivers so we can safely and quickly cross over. Frankly, it is disgusting to hear the people of digression clamor for change just for the sake of change, downgrading those who have gone before them, as if nothing of significance ever happened before these new wonders appeared on the scene.

One Great Quality of Abraham

It is a mark of greatness in a man, or a generation, to build for the future, to dig wells for generations yet to come. Abraham did this when he originally digged his wells. Civilization dies and real progress stagnates if people go backward or concentrate too long on themselves to the neglect of those of the future. I think of the founding fathers of our nation, many of whom were already aged men, who risked their all for a nation in which they could live but for a short time, but who had in mind their descendants. How little tribute we pay to such people who provided us freedoms that we may take for granted. These things are ours because of the sacrifice, toil, and tears of those before us. Abraham was not thinking only of himself when he digged his wells, but also his descendants who would inherit the land after him. Isaac appreciated what his father had done, and kept alive what was deserving. He, too, was not just concerned for himself.

Consider how few things we enjoy and take for granted that we have totally worked out ourselves, discovered for ourselves. We did not invent them, but others did. This is true of many material, mechanical, electrical, push-button things. Somebody figured it all out and made if possible. We come along and push a button, and may even fuss if it does not work immediately and perfectly.

This is also true of many sacred and spiritual truths that have been learned, written, and preserved in our world by those who were brave enough, wise enough, sacrificial enough, and strong enough to keep the light of truth burning brightly in a world of sinful darkness. This they have done in spite of many efforts to extinguish that light. How foolish, mistaken, conceited, and servile to pride are we when we think what we accomplish we have done without the help of those who have gone before us. How

selfish, egotistical, and spiritually immature and unjust we show ourselves to be should we speak disparagingly of the noble men and women of the past who often carved from near hopelessness great blessings of beauty.

Potential Mistakes

People are inclined to make two grave mistakes regarding the past. It is folly to think that only the things of the past are what is good, and use whatever was in the past accomplished by men as our religious authority. But it may be an even worse folly to discard the useful practices and proven principles of timeless truth and experience in order to latch on to that which is unstable. It is even worse yet when those who are untried, unproven, unstable, and are imitations of failures come forward to deride, ridicule, and war against people, deeds, truths, that have built the very platforms on which the present generation is privileged to stand; solid platforms that those who mock could not begin to build.

Disrespect of age, our heritage, the past, the old paths is a sin so prominent in our time. This is a violation of divine law. It is even evident in the church. God's Word does not lend itself to condone such disrespect. There have been wells digged before us which have been and still are under grave danger of being filled up by modern Philistines. Respect for the past does not stifle real progress, but guides it. If we be as wise as we would like to think we are, we would be modern-day Isaacs and dig again those wells, seek their fresh, life-giving, soul-satisfying waters, and quench our spiritual thirst with blessings that pour from them. This craving for the new has caused some to sacrifice soundness and compromise truth. They confuse being busy with the Lord's business. They want denominational Egypt rather than the pure wells of Canaan.

Much of the world drinks from defiled and polluted waters, being filled with the produce of the unclean, depraved reservoirs and fountains of corruption. Hence, we see the turmoil, wickedness, lawlessness, unrest, and degradation of our time. Many grope, seeking wistfully in desperation for the water of life that satisfies the longings of the soul. But too often, rather than expend the energy to reopen old wells that repeatedly prove valuable, they prefer

to dig new wells that repeatedly prove to be impure, shallow, temporary, and dry up in the drought of trial. Pride, arrogance, ignorance prevent many from digging where pure water has always been found.

Our Need Today

We need to return to the ways of the past in so many matters. We can hear some cry, "Traditionalist, legalist, on and on." It is strange how some who deplore the labels of liberal and modernist are profuse in labeling anybody that questions their elite judgment. "We must progress, go forward, move onward and upward, grow and glow," is the wail we hear. We do not disagree with that. But let us not confuse digression for progression, forward for backward, onward and upward for downward, and growing and glowing for puffing up and burning out. As we move, let us be careful which direction and stay on the right path. Some have moved far from Jerusalem and the way of God. Failing to heed the past and respecting it does not improve anything. Rather we stand in danger of going beyond the authority of God (Second John 9-11).

Paying attention to the old is taught in the Scriptures. Romans 15:4, *"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."* First Corinthians 10:11, *"Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."* Beware of those who only cry, "Future, future," without ample regard for the past.

God's Way

It is not by accident, but divine design, that older, seasoned, experienced, and faithful men are elders of the church. It is not an accident that adults are over the home rather than children. Proverbs 16:31, *"The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness."* Proverbs 22:28, *"Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set."* When Judah was running headlong to destruction in sin, going the path of Northern Israel, Jeremiah warned, *"Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your*

souls.” (Jeremiah 6:16). But many are like the last part of that verse, *“But they said, We will not walk therein.”*

We need to partake of the spirit of the past. Sometimes we hear people say, regarding what is called the Restoration Movement, the effort to restore New Testament Christianity in our time, that the older generation restored the form and doctrine, but now we must restore the spirit. It is true that many today do not have the right spirit. But the implication is that those of old did not have it either. I say to you that neither the form nor doctrine would have been restored except by the righteous spirit manifested over and over by those of the past. Nothing whatever of value could be restored by the flippant, arrogant, unstable, flighty, sophisticated, conceited, and intellectual disrespect so often seen today. Our “scholars” need a good dose of Proverbs 3:5, *“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.”*

We need the spirit of sacrifice seldom found today. We need the love and devotion to first things first, keeping a sensitivity toward worldliness, having respect for truth in manner of speech and daily dealings, a sense of honor, integrity, justice, and duty. We need the spirit of dignity for mankind and the willingness to obey. While we hear some saying, “We must think for ourselves,” and nobody objects to that, we wonder how the church exists among us today except for those who thought for themselves rather than following the ways of denominations some would have us follow. Thinking for oneself does not necessarily mean coming up with different conclusions. Re-examine the evidence, yes. We want no borrowed faith. But when those before us believed and obeyed the truth, and when we believe and obey the truth, we shall be as they were. It is ridiculous to brand everything as human tradition just because somebody believed it before we came along.

The Glorious Gospel

If more people would think rather than just think they think, they would see the beauty, relevance, value, usefulness, and glory of the gospel message nearly two thousand years old. It is a message that must be upheld before a cynical and sinful world by God’s noblemen who realize its worth and who are determined to keep it alive among men. People have sought to discount God, Christ, the Bible, the church, etc. The world changes, but not the

truth of God. There is no improvement men can make over prayer, worship, the Bible, Christian virtues, the doctrine of Christ on any point. We might at times improve some methods, but never the message.

Jude 3, "*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 once delivered unto the saints.*" Here is where we must set our hearts, minds and lives. The What Isaac did, digging again the old wells, resounds with a brilliance and wisdom that ought to motivate us to preserve the ancient truth of God for ourselves and for the generations yet to come. The preservation of ancient truth is a beautiful ministry that is open to every soul. It is necessary for true greatness in the sight of God.

* * * * *

PART THREE: THE RESTORERS

Before the 1800's there arose people who realized the need of going back to the Bible, back past the days of the origin of denominations, before the dominance of Romanism, prior to the apostasy of which the Scriptures warned, all the way back to the revealed faith of Christ found in the New Testament. The movement is usually called the Restoration Movement, not to be confused with the earlier Reformation Movement led by Luther and others that produced Protestantism. This restorative effort was not intended to produce a new church, nor just another church among the existing churches of human origin. It was the effort to return to the old paths, to dig again the spiritual wells of true Christianity.

The idea behind restoration work is to put back in its original place. That which was to be put in its original place was the church of which Christ is founder, head, and Savior. Men with names like Stone, Smith, Campbell, Jones, Scott, and many others reminded the world that we should speak where the Scriptures speak and be silent where the Scriptures are silent. As Peter had written "*If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.*" (First Peter 4:11). It was a call for the Biblical teaching that the

Bible is the sole authority in matters religious (Second Timothy 3:16,17). It was the determination to sow the seed of the kingdom in honest and good hearts and allow that seed to produce the kingdom, which is His church (Luke 8:11; Colossians 1:13). Contending that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16), the gospel was preached, people became Christians, no more and no less, detached from the denominational world, but attached to Christ. The New Testament church flourished.

We will not review the history of this effort except to say that it has seen good times and difficult times. It has met problems and many have digressed into human legalism, while others have pursued liberalism. But the work stays alive, although the advance of liberalism among the advocates of restoring New Testament Christianity has stifled its growth and progress until now there are indications that there is less and less interest in the faith once delivered.

In Our Time

Our day covers a span of nearly four decades of preaching the gospel as of this writing. We have seen the church be a fast growing religious body with missionary zeal, benevolent spirit, and souls saved. We have also witnessed division due to human legalism. But presently we suffer liberalism. The church now faces some of its greatest dangers and threats, not because of the newness of its enemy or the attacks against it, but because there is such Biblical ignorance among us, such a desire to be big and accepted, such conformity to the sins of the world, and the intensity of those who are determined to once again turn the church into nothing but a digressive denomination among other denominations. Our biggest problem is the effort to liberalize and secularize the church. There is a clamor for change for the sake of change. A passionate desire to imitate the deeds and words of religions around us is strong. But let us turn our attention to the attitudes held toward those people of the past who worked to restore primitive Christianity. There are legitimate and proper ways of considering them as well as erroneous ways. Keep in mind that the burden of their work was to call people to stand in the old paths, even though they were not perfect, nor ever professed to be.

A Biblical Call

The call of the restorers, to seek the old paths, is firmly grounded in Scripture as we have already noted. Consider in this connection Galatians 1:6-9; Jude 3, Second Corinthians 11:1-4; Matthew 18:19ff; Second John 9-11. There is not the slightest hint of change or variance in the gospel that is to be preached (Second Timothy 3:16,17; First Peter 4:11; First Corinthians 2:13,14). While we live in a changing world, there are those things that do not change, and God's Word is one of them. It never needs updating or revising. Man is basically the same; as is sin, the avenues of temptation, God, the gospel way of salvation, and His church. Only departures of men from the truth make such things appear to have changed. In a changing world we must learn to distinguish between the changing and the unchangeable.

The preaching recorded in the New Testament was not, strictly speaking, an effort to restore. It was to originate the faith, putting things in place for the first time. To restore implies there has been a departure from the faith, as the inspired writers foretold. It is designed to put things back in proper order and place.

The Old Testament contains much preaching to restore. The preaching by Ezra, Nehemiah, and many prophets was to call people back to the way they had left. They made their appeal to the Word of the Lord as the authority to follow. There was no appeal to what some may have thought, wanted, or pleased men. Their entire thought was preaching what God told them to say without change.

The Only Standard

The call to those who preach today is to make the Word of God the basis for everything. Any preacher who does not make his appeal on "*thus saith the Lord*" has no business in the pulpits before people who say they love the Lord. There is no place for the folly of secular book reviews, pep rallies, preaching reform without regeneration, theologies learned in seminaries, or sounding forth messages designed simply to make people feel good about themselves. This was not characteristic of New Testament preachers, and ought not be once named among us. But, alas, many have opted for such nonsense.

A serious restudy of the restorers and their work can be of great benefit. There is historical value, and we can see how we are historically connected with honorable and noble efforts of the past to exalt Christ and His church. We can learn from their learning for they were true scholars of the Bible, believing the Bible to be God's Word, and did not seek to exhibit their "learning" by quoting from those who think they are somewhat, but who do not have respect for the inspiration of the Scriptures, and are ignorant of the plan of salvation.

Their Spirit

As much as anything else, we need to partake of their spirit of concern, love for souls and the truth that saves, their willingness to stand, their courage and steadfastness. We wonder how many critics living today, who pour from the factories of clergymen, have the fortitude and spiritual backbone to even hold a candle to those great people of yesteryear who fought the good fight! Have we seen the dedication and spirit of sacrifice among the self-professed experts of our time, the academic "scholars" who denounce their works that was once the norm among faithful brethren? While some contend those former restored the form of Christianity but not the spirit, we contend that the present spirit of compromise, disobedience, and cowardice can never restore anything except more digression. We should wield the sword of the Spirit against the weaponry of Satan and false doctrines as they did. They were successful in battle after battle. If one wants good study material, study their writings, debates, and sermons. There is more Bible in what they said and wrote than in all the denominational and theological foolishness that so often comes from pulpits among us, especially among the more numerous, financially secure, worldly and prominent congregations. Why do those who say they are preachers fill their libraries with the garbage of modernist writers and denominational clergymen than with works of those who have stood for truth and remained true to His cause? Is it not because they love the ways of men more than the way of God?

Attitude of Ridicule

There are basically three attitudes one can hold toward the early restorers in the Restoration Movement. Two are wrong and the third commendable.

Some delight in ridiculing those of the past. They make snide remarks about them to discredit them, labeling them old-fashioned, fogies, irrelevant to our "enlightened" age. It has amazed me how some contend people today are so "enlightened" and yet sin runs more rampant, Biblical ignorance is more prominent, and disrespect against God so intense that the world becomes more and more dangerous in which to live. Just what do these latter-day "wise men" call "enlightenment?" Are we "enlightened" the more we defy God?

Some of these who ridicule noblemen often speak of "love." They know nothing of love as the Bible teaches. They think love is compromise, emotionalism, sentimentality, permissiveness, a mushy tolerance of false doctrines and worldliness. That kind of "love" is their calling card. They are noted for it. Unable to take the Bible and sustain what they contend, they seek to convert, not man to God, but God to man as man thinks man ought to be allowed to be. Unable to defend their faith, they denounce those who defend **the** faith. Many have been, and more will likely be, deceived by such vicious servants of the devil who pose as ministers of light. Their major appeal is a self-determined, intellectual superiority, knowledge of human philosophies and theories, but with little regard for what the Bible does teach. Unable to take a stand and withstand, they smear and slash past and present who still stand on the Rock that cannot be moved.

It is certainly not a notable and honorable stance to attack the persons who can no longer defend themselves, using ridicule and slander, just because one cannot undo what they taught by Scripture. Yet, some of our people have stooped to such tactics and are not above being venomous and vile in their characterizations of the early workers of God who urged people to stand in the old paths. Shame!

Not Our Authority

A second faulty attitude is to consider the early restorers as authority. The charge is often heard, as if it was general among us, that we preach the doctrines of the restorers, not the Bible. It is one thing to make such a charge, but has proven to be quite another to cite precisely

what is meant. Let those who so charge be specific and show what is taught by the authority of any man, other than the inspired men of Scripture! To simply say we teach our own peculiar doctrines while "other denominations" teach their doctrines is a slanderous lie until those who so charge have the courage to prove what they charge.

Does one turn to Campbell to show the church is the kingdom? Does one turn to Stone to prove the necessity of baptism? Do we follow Scott in observing the Lord's Supper every first day of the week? These restorers taught these things, but for the same reason we do. They are taught in Scripture. Some outside the church, and others whose ministry is to attack the church, are going to give account for the lies being propagated about gospel preachers and faithful churches. While some misinformed and ignorant brethren may have cited those of the past as authority for what they believe, no faithful member of the Lord's church turns to anything other than "*thus saith the Lord*" for authority. No man nor group of men formulate the doctrine of Christ. If there is Biblical authority, it is true, Without it, it deserves no hearing. Some attack straw men.

There is the area of faith and the area of opinion. Matters of faith are where God has spoken. Matters of opinion are where human judgment must be exercised to expedite what God has spoken where details are not given. Nobody has any business contending his opinion must be followed as if it was God's law. Nobody has any business dismissing anything God has authorized, adding to what God has said, subtracting from His Word, or injecting false and human doctrines. But we see today so many who are saddling the church with much for which there is no authority, pushing their innovations and additions, burdening and dividing the church with trivia that comes not from God, but only appeals to the desires and ambitions of men, particularly the worldly and ambitious.

Some today, unable to cite Biblical authority for what they have decided to do, cite what they call "time honored positions" held by various leaders of the present and past. What difference does it make how "time honored" a position is if it is not Scripturally authorized? Such is designed to liberalize and secularize the church, taking the church into activities and areas never taught for the church in the Bible. This attitude toward what early restorers may have thought, using them as authority, is as wrong as holding them in contempt with ridicule.

The Correct Attitude

We show the proper attitude and respect for the early restorers and their labors when we display the same wisdom they displayed by going to the Bible, standing in the old paths, contending for the faith, defending it, promoting it before all, "*speaking the truth in love.*" We have the right attitude when we realize the Bible and only the Bible can be cited for authority, and that we must have authority for all we do (Colossians 3:17). The better we know **the book**, the less likely we are to be tossed to and fro (Ephesians 4:14), and be carried away into the certain digression the present trend is taking. We must insist the ancient landmarks be not removed, and stand with the early restorers in their respect to the inspired Word. God has drawn the line of truth. Shall we respect it or not?

* * * * *

PART FOUR: WHERE TO STAND

Having established the need of standing in the old paths, and pointing out the proper attitude to hold regarding the early restorers and the Restoration Movement, and emphasizing that it is absolutely essential to use the Bible and only the Bible as authority for what we say, do and believe, we now turn our attention to just a few of the basic and fundamental matters as to what it means to stand in the old paths.

Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). This Word must be preached (Mark 16:15). Standing in the old paths begins with the content of the message, **the faith once delivered** (Jude 3).

Although at times it can be very unpopular to simply stand, there is nothing else to do if we please God. We may not convince everyone around us of the truth, and we must not be knocked off track by their rejection of it. We must learn to endure whatever be the consequences of standing in the old paths regardless of others. Many early Christians were martyred rather than surrender or deny **the faith**. They knew, however, the need of standing firm.

Much that this final lesson includes will be familiar to the faithful students of the Word. It is the old,

old story of Jesus and His love. But we shall discuss certain matters where the “old Jerusalem ring” seems to be confused in many places with a “new” heretical noise. There are matters where sound words and sound doctrine have been set aside for other messages. The topics under consideration have become the front line in the battle between truth and error, faithfulness and apostasy.

The Authority

Christians must always show they care about people, truth, the present, and eternity. It is a worthy thought that suggests, “People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.” We learn to care because of what Scripture teaches. It is not unfair nor unreasonable to think that many are ignorant of the truth because they do not care what they do, believe, how they consider others, or the things that really matter. They are not convinced of the inspiration of the Bible (Second Timothy 3:16,17; First Corinthians 2:12,13; Second Peter 1:20,21, and others). Unless we know the place for Scripture, its origin, and how God has brought it to us, we are not likely to consider it as authority. The denominational world has compromised, negotiated, dialogued, humanized, protested, mythologized, merged, ridiculed, tolerated false doctrines, and summarized the Scriptures until they have no authority, nor give the Bible the respect it demands and deserves. Christ is authority (Matthew 28:18), and we shall be judged by His Word (John 12:48). Once you abandon the inspired, all-sufficient, infallible, inerrant, authoritative Word, you have no guide. The Bible is the only source available to know the Lord. Once this fact is firmly established you have that upon which you can build, something to learn, a reliable guide and standard by which to measure.

We are in a virtual life and death struggle to sustain in the hearts and minds of people the reality of the integrity and validity of the Bible. Without this conviction there are no paths we can travel with any assurance or certainty.

Deity of Jesus Christ

The Scriptures teach the Deity of Jesus Christ. No person who has ever walked this earth has been maligned,

attacked, and castigated like our Lord. Modernism and liberalism has made intense attempts to discredit His identity as the Son of God. They would teach that Jesus of Nazareth lived (although some even deny this), that He was a masterful teacher, even a good man, but not Deity in the flesh as the Bible teaches. Is it not strange that anyone could consider Him a good man while He lied regarding His identity as God's Son? What blatant inconsistency!

The overwhelming Biblical evidence is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. There is no doubt what the Bible teaches on this point (John 1:1,14; Matthew 1:20,23; 16:16; Acts 2:36; John 3:16). Passages affirming His dual nature are plentiful. One may not believe it, but there is no doubt that it teaches His Deity. From the evidence we must make known to the world who He is. Anything whatever that detracts from this fundamental truth must be resisted with diligence. The validity of the Christian faith rests on the claim of Jesus to be the Son of God.

Plan of Salvation

We must return to the old paths regarding God's role in saving man, as well as man's part in God's plan. God saves us by His grace, love, mercy, and blood of Christ. Without this there would be no salvation. Man alienates himself from God by sin (Isaiah 59:1,2), and we are all guilty of sin because we personally partake of it (Romans 3:23; 5:12). We cannot save ourselves by ourselves, but must rely on that which God has provided (Ephesians 1:7; 2:8,9; Titus 3:3-5; John 3:16).

Man must do his part in God's plan (Hebrews 5:9). Even as man obeys he is not earning nor meriting salvation. Salvation, however, is conditional. If we do not obey we shall not be saved. Nothing is more urgent than for sinful man to learn that he must believe in Christ (John 8:240, repent of his sins (Luke 13:3), confess his faith in Christ (Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10), and be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins (Galatians 3:27; Acts 2:38).

While I was preaching in a gospel meeting a denominational person remarked to me after my sermon on the plan of salvation, "You people are still saying the same old thing you said fifty years ago." She meant it as a criticism, but such was a compliment. When one preaches

the truth he will preach the "same old thing" that has been preached since Pentecost.

We need to present the plan of salvation regularly. I do it every service. This "come forward if you feel you have a need" stuff is no invitation which one can accept with knowledge and conviction. Who does not have a need or want to do better? The question is, "Who wants to obey the gospel of Christ and be saved from sins by His blood?" We must preach the old paths of entering Christ. Some ridicule this by calling us "five-steppers," (hear, believe, repent, confess, be baptized). What of that? It is the truth, and the truth must be preached.

The Holy Spirit

We must teach the role of the Holy Spirit in converting, leading, and guiding mankind. Christ promised the Holy Spirit to His apostles (John 14,15,16), a promise fulfilled on Pentecost (Acts 2). The Holy Spirit's work was to reprove (convict) the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment by the preaching of the Word given the apostles.

Scripture does not teach the Holy Spirit operates directly upon the heart of man separate and apart from the Word. There is no special guidance, mysterious voice, feelings or emotional reactions that should be thought as the work of the Holy Spirit. Some mistakenly assign the Holy Spirit as the source of their experiences, especially if there is something about the experience that they do not understand. But we do not find Biblical basis for the literal, actual, personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit by which we are led, guided, and instructed. It is unfortunate that some are malcontent with the all-sufficient Word and seek something extra and special beyond what God offers. For God to choose to do special favors of this nature for some and not for all contradicts the teaching that He is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34,35). The Spirit dwells in us as we abide in the Word of God. He influences, leads, directs man by the Word. When people understand this they will respect the Word and obey it rather than be looking for that "something special" to overcome them.

The Church

The old paths include showing the place of the church in God's plan of salvation for man. This doctrine of "preaching Christ, but not the church" is heresy of the devil. One cannot possibly do it. Denominationalists have falsely contended one church is as good as another, and that it makes no difference to which church you belong so long as you are honest and sincere, but not the gospel.

The church is composed of people, but a different and peculiar people. It is composed of saved people, those who have obeyed the gospel, being redeemed by the blood of Christ. While one denomination is as good as the next, the Lord's church is not a denomination. Christ is the Savior of the church (Ephesians 5:23). The church is the saved (Acts 2:47). Even some among us have decided the ways of denominational error suit them better than the old paths of truth. Just how one expects to be saved outside the church, His body, is yet a mystery. Can the body be separate from the head and survive?

Certain and Sound Speech

The language of Ashdod is often heard. Some contend the church is an organism, not an organization. The church is a living body, an organism, the body of Christ. But it is also a kingdom, an organization, with Christ as its King. There is a governmental system that Scripture reveals for operating the church. Why would one make it either/or, when it is both? Faithful brethren must once again teach the hearts of baptized believers the sanctity of the governmental structure of the Lord's church.

Doctrines held where one eldership oversees several congregations is foreign to truth, must be repudiated and branded as digressive. The tampering with the government of the church was historically one of the major departures from truth that produced the Catholic Church. Shall we go that way of heresy again?

Worship

The battle continues over the worship under Christ. The early church worshipped through prayer, singing, study of His Word, giving, and the Lord's Supper. Through the years men have sought to add and change the avenues of worship to make them "more meaningful," introducing their own ways, doctrines, rituals, and innovations. The

church today still must contend for singing without mechanical instruments of music. The only reason we need to refuse them is to know that their use is without authority. There are numerous other reasons, but this one is sufficient. My father used to say that there were three reasons he did not do certain things; First, he did not have the money, and the other two did not make any difference. That settled that. The same is true regarding instruments. There is no Biblical authority for them and that ends it.

Faithful brethren must contend for the observance of the Lord's Supper every first day of the week. Uncertain and false sounds are heard now and then from denominational imitators that it does not matter when or how often the Supper is eaten. The Bible teaches when, and that settles that for the faithful.

The Work of the Church

As much as any other area we must stand in the old paths regarding the work of the church. While some recognize the error of perverting the worship, they run headlong into perverting the work of the church, involving the church in such unauthorized activities as recreation, entertainment, secular education, and social reform without regeneration of the soul. We recently heard of one church having a car wash just to do good things for the neighbors. Do you really think this is the reason our Lord shed His blood and purchased the church, so we could wash cars for our neighbors? The church is the "*pillar and ground of the truth*" (First Timothy 3:15), not just a service club. It has the duty to "*preach the word*" to the lost and saved. When do we return to the task assigned us and leave these trivia that enamors so many? When one thinks of the funds spent to build gymnasiums, jogging tracks, weight rooms, tennis courts, fellowship halls, family life centers, contributions for teaching biology, chemistry, mathematics, and supporting ball teams, etc., one wonder just when and where such brethren ever acquainted themselves with the Word of God?

The benevolent work of the church usually suffers for lack of funds, yet many think there are sufficient funds for their "fun and games, friendship evangelism." While the church starves and withers because of lack of spiritual nourishment from the Word, some brethren are rampant on being accepted by the community, doing those

worldly things that denominations have found to produce numbers. The work of the church is to save the lost, sustain the saved, help the needy. This is what characterizes the old paths. When we set our hearts and minds on doing the will of God, the church will not be burdened and troubled by the social, recreational, and economic pursuits that some wish to unload on the church. "Go with the gospel" is the message of truth. Too many have allow the gospel to go.

Christlike Lives

The old paths will insist on the imitation of Christ in daily living. How can we know what Christ would have us do when we are not built up in the most holy faith with the knowledge of His Word? Purity of life, **abstinence** from sin, such as drinking alcoholic beverages, modern dancing, smoking, taking drugs to "get high," cursing, adultery, lying, stealing, cheating, will become our watchword when we live by the old paths of righteousness. Does not the church suffer today because of the imitation of the world rather than the practice of the Word?

As Christians we are to put off the old man and put on the new. Love and friendship of the world is not compatible with faithfulness. While we live in the world, we are not to be of the world.

More we could add, including the theme of genuine love as taught by the Lord, lessons on the origin, purpose, and destiny of mankind, the cross, the resurrection, the coming judgment, the absolute necessity of obeying the Lord. If only we would search the Scriptures and see what is so. This is what standing in the old paths demands.

We would have thought it nigh impossible, certainly unlikely that a struggle would be occurring in the Lord's church over the role of women in the church seeing how explicit are the teachings of the Word of God on this subject. Some love the ways of the times more than the old paths of God. Again, we prefer the old paths of truth.

Closing Words of Wisdom

F. G. Allen once wrote, (Search for the Ancient Order, Vol. II, page 463), "While we remain true to the principles on which we started out, there is no earthly power that can impede our progress. But the day we leave these walls and go out to take counsel with the world, will

mark the day of our decline. We have nothing to fear from without. Our only danger lies in the direction of indifference and compromise. While we are true to God in the maintenance of these principles, the divine blessings will be upon our work. But should they ever be surrendered, ruin will as certainly follow as that the Bible is true."

*"What shall we say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). "Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not." (Galatians 6:9). "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." (Romans 8:18). "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." (First Corinthians 15:58). Some of old said they would **not** walk in the old paths. Let us resolve there will be no other paths in which we shall even think of walking.*

* * * * *

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Attitudes Have Changed Regarding the Old Paths

Some who wage war against the old paths would have us think they have not changed doctrine, but only bad attitudes that they once held toward those in error. **This is not so.** If

they had bad attitudes toward those they considered wrong, they sure

continue sinister attitudes toward the church now with their ridicule, sarcasm, and air of superiority.

The attitude they have changed is toward the Bible as authority. They no longer accept it. With the position of the "new" hermeneutics, and denial that the Bible is our pattern, there is nothing anybody can do that cannot be considered acceptable, except to consider the Bible as the final authority. **That they cannot tolerate.**



JAMES W. BOYD

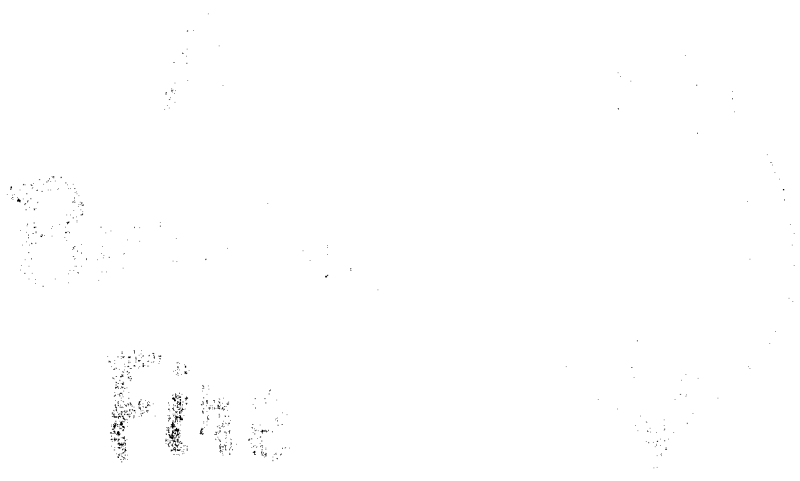
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*"But his word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones,
and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay." (Jeremiah 20:9).*

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Andrew

John 1:35-42, *“Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold, the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master), where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two which heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.”*

John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ. He came preaching, *“Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.”* (Mark 1:3). He preached, *“Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”* (Matthew 3:2). Mark 1:4 also records, *“John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.”* John 3:28-30, *“Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice; this my joy is therefore fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease.”*

Who Was Andrew?

Among those who heard John identify Jesus as the *“Lamb of God”* was a man named Andrew. Over half of the time when Andrew is identified it is in reference to his more famous brother, Simon Peter. Andrew became one of the

twelve apostles, but not one of the ‘inner circle’ with Peter, James, and John. He was a fisherman by occupation, not a noted man as the world regards men. Nor was he as conspicuous for his work in the New Testament record as some others. Relatively little is said of him when compared to Peter, James, John, Paul, Barnabas, and others. He wrote no record of the life of Christ as did Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. He was not known to be eloquent like Apollos, or a son of exhortation like Barnabas. He was not the great soul-winner like Paul. Even yet, he is not as recognized as Timothy and Titus.

Sometimes people think if they cannot be among the “greats” that they will do nothing and be nothing. What a terrible mistake! But Andrew was not of that perverted disposition. Jesus once said, *“And to every man his work.”* (Mark 13:34). Paul wrote, *“Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor.”* (First Corinthians 3:8).

Soul Winner

Andrew went about his work in such fashion that he stands as an example for soul winning. He seems to have been quiet, persistent, and faithful in his task. He is noted for introducing people to Christ, a real missionary in what we sometimes call personal work.

Believed

What qualified Andrew to be a soul winner? First, he was convinced of the truth regarding Jesus. To Peter he said, *“We have found the Messiah.”* This was not a guess with him. He did not say that Jesus could possibly be the Messiah, or that He was someone they needed, or even one who offered something pretty good. But there was complete assurance and confidence. He was positive without doubt. *“We have found the Messiah. The Christ is come. We know Him.”* This was his attitude. Unless one is convinced of that truth himself, how can he expect to convince others?

The faith of Andrew was in the person, Jesus Christ. *“We have found HIM.”* He had not just found someone, or some organization, a code of doctrine and ethics, because

Andrew accepted **HIM**. Without the acceptance of the person there can be no real acceptance of His teaching. When one rejects the teaching it is evident he rejects the person. But Andrew's confidence was in Jesus. So must it be with everyone who is convinced concerning Christ, and who would lead others to Christ.

We want to repeat for emphasis' sake, and to make the clear the truth, that our faith is in Christ, the person. But how can there be a separation between the Person and the Person's doctrine, church, identity, etc.?

He Sought Others

Andrew was qualified to be a soul winner because he sought others to come to Christ. He made a deliberate, intentional effort in that direction. Would you want to let others know if you had come to a knowledge of the cure for cancer? Could you keep it within yourself and refuse to let others be aware of it? Certainly not! The child of God in Christ has more to offer than the cure for cancer. He has the message of salvation from sin. Cancer is hideous and dreadful, but is confined to this world. Sin, hideous and dreadful, contaminates this life and brings ruin eternally to those who are not saved from its bondage. Is there not something essentially selfish and wrong in a professed Christian who has been forgiven to not tell others of the forgiving Christ?

The first one Andrew sought was Peter, his fleshly brother. Like Cornelius, he *"called his kinsmen and his friends."* (Acts 10:24). When Peter eventually did so much for the cause of Christ, do not you think Andrew rejoiced that he had sought him? Surely, he knew that the day he brought Peter to Christ was a good day's accomplishment.

What did Andrew tell Peter? He simply told him of his faith and the reason for it. He had evidence from John and the prophets. He himself had been with Jesus. Who cannot do as much as Andrew did? He knew the blessings of being with Christ, and wanted Peter to know the same joy. Andrew realized that phrase that someone has coined, "We are saved to save." *"Restore unto me the joy of salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. Then will I teach*

transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee.” (Psalm 51:12,13).

Another instance when Andrew introduced others to Jesus is recorded in John 6:5-9. *“When Jesus then lifted up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one may take a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?”*

The matter of feeding this multitude was such that Philip concluded it could not be done. Neither did Andrew have any real solution to offer. But he obviously brought the lad with his “lunch” to Jesus, and Jesus took what the lad possessed, and with it blessed the multitude, and provided for them all. This was one of the miracles performed by Jesus during His personal ministry.

Glad Andrew Acted

There are several heroes in this event, and surely Andrew is one of them. What if Andrew had done nothing? Sometimes those of us who preach and teach, as well as parents, feel we are accomplishing so little regarding those with whom we work. It may be that we are too inclined to overlook what seems insignificant, but in reality, is important. From Andrew, who brought the lad with his small amount of food, we should learn not to consider anything or anybody without significance. Nobody is too small to be brought to Christ. There is no such thing as an unimportant person because we each have a spirit that shall survive this earthly life. As one commented, “You can count the seeds in an apple, but you cannot count the number of apples that may come from a seed.” So we should learn to be an Andrew and consider everything and everybody to be of potential. We should not despise the day of small things, (Zechariah 4:10), and think only what is big is good.

Again, John 12:20-22, *"And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: the same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus."*

These people wanted to see Jesus and know more about Him. While they may have been Gentiles, or proselytes, the natural hesitation of association between them and Jews was not considered important. They may have been Jews from Grecian areas. But when Philip was approached by them, he did not seem to know exactly what to do, and he took them to talk with Andrew, who "majored" in introducing people to Christ. He knew what to do, and with Philip, took them to Christ. This was characteristic of Andrew.

As we stated, these people might have been Gentiles. Andrew may well have remembered the teaching from Jesus such as is recorded in John 10:16, *"Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall be one fold, and one shepherd."*

Need for "Andrews"

The Lord's church needs "Andrews" today who have an interest in saving the lost. The early church had this concern. Even under persecution, when the church was scattered abroad, the Scripture says, they *"went every where preaching the word."* (Acts 8:4). They had the Andrew attitude.

Notice the chain of growth. Jesus found Philip, and Philip found Nathanael. John the Baptist found Andrew, and Andrew found Peter, and look at the host Peter found, such as those on Pentecost, Cornelius, and countless others. What a tragedy if Andrew had not been a sturdy link in that chain. How many would never have known salvation except for the work done by this good man!

"One man tells another," is in essence what Paul says to Timothy Second Timothy 2:2, *"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."*

Someone taught me, and someone taught you. Probably you are the result of the combined efforts of many people having taught you. But do we not have the obligation to teach another so that they can know the joy and hope of salvation in Christ as we have come to know it? This is a part of that great commission, "*Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.*" (Mark 16:15). It is not sufficient that we depend upon a few preachers to do this task. Each one, to the extent of his ability and opportunity, should become an "Andrew." Otherwise, souls that could be in heaven in eternity will never be saved.

If you cannot sing like angels,
If you cannot preach like Paul,
You can tell of the love of Jesus,
You can say he died for all.

If you cannot cross the ocean,
And the heathen land explore,
You can find a soul much closer,
You can find one just next door."

* * * * *

Christian Recreation

First Corinthians 10:31-33, "*Whether therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.*"

Paul states a fundamental rule regarding conduct as a Christian that is applicable to every realm of life. All we do should aim at the glory of God, giving no offence to others that would hinder them from being saved. Especially does Paul teach we must consider the welfare of the church in all our activities. We wish to apply this principle in the realm of recreation that is suitable for the Christian.

What It Is

First, recreation is simply recreating, refreshing, restoring, renewing of the mental, physical, and emotional strength. Our Lord, being human as well as Deity, after a busy day in His labor, rested. Mark 6:31, *"And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while; for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat."* He needed to get away from the multitudes, visiting friends, teaching, and all His work, and be refreshed with rest and recreation. Our subject, properly understood, is something needful to the body and mind, and we ought have periods of time for it.

To Each His Own

Second, what may be recreational for one may not be for another. A truck driver does not usually like to take a long drive. A brick layer may not want to play baseball. A teacher or student may not relax with a good book. A mail man who walks his route does not choose a stroll. There is too often the tendency in some to condemn a form of recreation that simply does not appeal to them, but it does appeal and is helpful to others.

Third, we ought not approach the subject of recreation for the Christian with an entirely negative approach. There are those things that are not acceptable and we need to be aware of them. But we also must determine what is acceptable and available to us that can be used within Christian principles. First Thessalonians 5:21,22, *"Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil."*

Let us make eight scriptural tests of recreation. All human activity can be categorized into three classifications: (1) That which is always right; (2) That which is always wrong; (3) That which may at times be right in itself, but sinful because of other circumstances and factors. It is this third area where we have the most difficulty in choosing. Some things may appear quite innocent, but under certain circumstances can be very harmful. This is not the same as situational ethics that contends everything is relative,

no right or wrong at anytime, but only what you think at the time. We reject that philosophy as anti-Christian.

Conscience

Test One: Will this activity hurt my conscience? Romans 14:23, "*For whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*" Faith in this passage refers to one's personal conviction. It is wrong to violate what you think is right. Your convictions may be in error, and this does not teach if you think something is good that it is, or if you think something is bad is must be bad. It teaches that doing what you believe to be wrong is wrong whether the action is wrong in itself or not. We cannot be honest if we do what we think we ought not. Our consciences must be trained according to God's Word so they will be offended when we violate His will, and be at peace when we are in harmony with His will. If we are not conscientiously comfortable in what we are doing, we ought leave it off. When in doubt, don't.

Body

Test Two: Will this activity be harmful to my body or mind? There are activities that can harm rather than help. Some even dissipate rather than recreate. Our bodies belong to the Lord (First Corinthians 3:16,17; 6:19,20). If a Christian does that which abuses the body, he errs. Recreation is designed to take care of the body and help it grow, develop, be revitalized and made stronger. If some things are overdone, they can injure the body and ought be left alone.

Pure

Test Three: Does it appeal to the indecent and lustful in mankind? Paul told Timothy, "*Flee youthful lusts.*" (Second Timothy 2:22). Is the activity done within New Testament standards of modesty? No form of pleasure or recreation ought to be done where there are strong pressures that arouse unholy thoughts, and appeal to the lust of the flesh or eye. This is one of several reasons why swimming in mixed company of male and female is off limits to the faithful child of God. The attire is immodest.

There are activities where anger is often provoked, and unruly conduct is the norm. Unless one can control his temper in these things, he should seek something else.

Our world and society is suffering from an intoxication of appeals to the flesh. We as Christians must stay away from such things. Even though some cry, "You cannot be extreme," we must remember that we must be a Christian, even if some may think it is extreme. The Christian is going to bend toward right without the tint of wrong lest he become a hindrance to himself and others near him.

Influence

Test Four: Will this action harm other people? Romans 14:7, "*None of us liveth to himself...*" We all influence others. The manner of life of a Christian can and does have an impact on other people. We cannot have the attitude that what we do is nobody's business but our own. We must ask, "What will people think of me as a Christian in this activity? What will other Christians think? What effect will it have on my role or representing Christ in this world? How does it affect the church, its reputation and influence?" Matthew 5:16, "*Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*" We have to consider this in choosing our recreational activities.

Christians are taught to refrain from that which causes another to stumble (Romans 14; First Corinthians 8,9,10). People have been heard to say, "But this does not hurt me." While that may be true, what of others? You could be the cause of leading others to lower or relax safeguards which they need to stay faithful before God. Even if we are strong, and not easily tempted or swayed, someone else may not be so strong, and we can "*sin against the brethren,*" (First Corinthians 8:12), by ignoring them and what they think. We become a tool for Satan rather than for God. Many Christians have destroyed their good influence because they have persisted in various forms of recreation that causes others to sin. It is not too much to expect a Christian to put the salvation of souls, and the glory of God, before his own recreation. Already we can see how careful we must be to choose wisely and with a mind toward purity in selecting how we enjoy recreational activities.

Associates

Test Five: Will this action take me among evil companions? First Corinthians 15:33 warns against that sort of thing. We influence others, but others also influence us. As one has said, "You cannot play in the mud and not get dirty." Psalm 1:1, "*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.*"

We have to be concerned what kind of people generally are involved in this activity. There are places a Christian cannot go and associates with whom he cannot be too friendly, lest temptation to leave the good for the bad be too strong. James wrote, "*Friendship with the world is enmity with God.*" (James 4:4). Christians need to be careful about doing acceptable things, but also to do them with people and in places where the devil cannot slyly entice them.

What Would He Do?

Test Six: In a measure, this may be the "acid" test. Would Jesus do this? When you know a person well enough, you can be rather certain what he would do and think about a matter. The better we know the Christ, the easier it is for us to decide what we ought and ought not do. Christians are to follow His steps (First Peter 2:21).

Many problems of recreation that temporarily confuse us would be answered if we would try to picture Jesus in that activity. Would it be like Christ to be doing it, or approve of it for others? Do you think He would be glad to join you in it, or rebuke you for it? Would He dress as you have and act as you do? Surely, there are those popular activities that we might want to do, but when we test it by asking, "Would Jesus be with me and approve?" we can see we ought abandon some things and stay near the way of Christ.

After Prayer

Test Seven: How does this action of recreation seem after we have prayed about it? You might think it strange to pray about recreation. But the Christian ought pray about his activities. A good rule is, "If you cannot pray over it, don't do it."

Prayer is strengthening and sobering. It helps bring realities into sharper focus. Some things seem innocent enough until exposed to the light of prayer. Can we ask God to bless us in what we do? Or are we just a little ashamed to talk with God about it at all?

Consistent

Test Eight: Does it conflict with my duty to worship? Does it lessen my interest in worship and Bible study? Does it deprive me of faithfully partaking of the Lord's Supper, giving as I should, etc." We have no vacation from worship. Our duty to God always must be first before anything else. Too often, fun and games have displaced God. Such activities as that should be omitted in life.

We conclude that, while it is not always easy to determine just which recreation is proper, we are better able to decide by asking and honestly answering these questions. We probably do not accomplish too much to go through a catalog of activities and stamp them, "Yes," or "No." But we need to apply principles to each proposed activity of recreation. We need to think about these things in choosing our vacations. After all, did not we promise God we would be faithful to Him above all else? If we cannot keep our word regarding recreation, something is lacking.

* * * * *

While He Lingered

Genesis 19:15,16, "*And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city. And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.*"

Chapter eighteen tells how God had told Abraham He would destroy Sodom and Gomorrah because, "*their sin is very grievous.*" (Genesis 18:20). Abraham asked, "*Wilt thou destroy the righteous with the wicked?*" (Genesis 18:23). God said He would spare the cities if ten righteous men could be found in them. Evidently there were not ten there, and the cities were destroyed.

While Lot was living in Sodom he was visited by two angels from God who warned Lot of the coming destruction (Genesis 19:12,13). Lot in turn warned his married daughters, but his sons-in-law mocked him (Genesis 19:14). Then a strange thing is said of Lot in our text.

The angels had to hasten him to leave the city. He lingered to the point that they had to take him by the hand and bring him out. We are made to wonder why Lot hesitated to leave, knowing as he did what was coming. Why did he not demonstrate a greater faith in God and His Word? He certainly believed in God. He was a righteous man, and Abraham had him in mind when he sought the preservation of the cities. Second Peter 2:8 describes Lot as a just and righteous man who knew the city was wicked and that it deserved the destruction that was coming. His soul was vexed by the unlawful and immoral deeds of the inhabitants. He had every reason to get out as fast as he could leave. But He did not.

He did not deny the truthfulness of the warning. He also knew the way of escape. The angels were pleading with him, yet, he lingered. Why would he do that?

Why Linger?

The Bible does not give us a specific answer to our question as puzzling as Lot's behavior may seem to us. But there are a number of plausible explanations that can be suggested. Maybe he hated to leave some of his family behind. He might have thought of considerable monetary investments he would lose. After all, he had pitched his tent toward the plains for material gain. Could it be he misunderstood the nature of God, thinking God would never do such a thing to anybody regardless of how wicked they were? Some forget that the merciful and gracious God of love is also just, and an avenger against those that do

evil. What kind of God would God be if He treated goodness and evil just alike? There are other explanations possibly for his hesitation. But none justified his stall.

His Folly

Whatever might have been his reasons, we cannot fail to see the folly of his delay. There was nothing to gain and everything, including his life, to lose. Time was precious and the situation was an emergency. Judgment on Sodom was sure and there was no escape from it. Everything was crying to him, "**GO!**" It did not make any sense whatever for him to linger. How foolish we can see Lot was under those conditions!

But have we not seen many others acting just as foolishly today? Both the young and old, men and women, boys and girls, hesitate in doing as they ought in obeying the gospel, and it makes no more sense than it did for Lot. In fact, the consequences of lingering are worse.

Life is brief on this earth at the longest. James 4:13,14, "*Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain. Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.*" Thousands pass into eternity every day.

Judgment

To be sure, all that die shall be raised (John 5:28,29). But the day of judgment is coming (Hebrews 9:27; Second Peter 3:10). This world shall not stand, but shall cease to be when the Lord returns. The destiny of each one will either be heaven or hell (Matthew 25:46). Have we not been sufficiently warned, (Acts 20:31), and that these things are inevitable, (Revelation 20:12,13)? Meanwhile, the way of salvation is open to us, (John 14:6), even as it was before Lot. There is only one way (Acts 4:12). Why does anybody hesitate to do what the Lord has commanded man to do in order to be prepared for that day and hour? Why does anybody see fit to linger unprepared? Why do you wait, dear brother?

One thing we know. While God is merciful and his angels or messengers are appealing to mankind now to get right with God, God will not send someone to lay hands on us and force us out of bondage of sin into the security of deliverance. If one is delivered, he must go on his own decision, voluntarily, willingly, submissively, obediently, or he will surely perish. It will be far worse than the physical destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Excuses

But people make many excuses for not coming to Christ. Some say they are good enough already, while others say they are not good enough to come. Some cry they are too young, while others say they are too old and waited too long. Still others say they could not hold out faithful. Often we hear people complaining of hypocrites in the church, yet, they are refusing to obey God because of hypocrites, not realizing that they that never come to Christ and the hypocrites shall both be lost in hell.

It is sad that many are misled to believe they are secure when actually they have not yet obeyed God. They have been taught false doctrines of men, and they "feel" everything is well, but they are still lost. They have been told they must wait until God calls them in some special way, by some emotional experience, not realizing that God is already calling them through the gospel, (Second Thessalonians 2:14), but they are not responding.

But after all is said and done, no matter what may be the excuse one offers for hesitating, there not only is an answer to offset the excuse, but so long as they continue to obey the Lord they cannot be saved. To doubt this is to doubt the warning God has already given us repeatedly. How do you expect God to be pleased with you if you persist in turning away from His commands?

The only reason a person ought not be a Christian is because he has not yet heard and obeyed the gospel. He has not yet learned what he must do to be saved. Once he knows, there is no excuse for hesitation. What one must do to be saved can be related in a few lines.

Doing

First, be assured there is something you must do (Matthew 7:21; Hebrews 5:9; Acts 2:40). Nobody can read these inspired words and doubt that a man plays a part in God's plan for saving man. People who heard the gospel in New Testament times were not Christians just because they heard the gospel. They asked what they must do (Acts 2:37; 9:6; 16:30). Once they were told, they acted in obedience.

You must believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (John 3:16; 8:24; Acts 16:31; Hebrews 11:6; Acts 18:8). Even though some teach that salvation is by faith alone, that is a false doctrine and never found in Scripture. But make no mistake, one must believe in Christ. It is in Christ where we must place our faith, trust, and confidence. There can be no salvation without the right kind of faith.

You must repent of your sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; 17:30; Second Peter 3:9). The message of repentance, the change of mind, is one of the essential steps in coming to God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

You must confess faith in Christ (Luke 12:8,9; Romans 10:9,10; Acts 8:37). We are not told to confess our sins, or that we believe God has saved us. It is implied that we admit our sins by coming to Christ. We are told to confess Christ.

You must be baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. Baptism is a divine command for salvation (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 10:48; 22:16; First Peter 3:21; Galatians 3:27; Romans 6:3,4). How much more Biblical evidence and revelation does anybody need to be assured of these things? How could God have expressed the matter any clearer?

In the New Testament, when people were so informed, they acted, and did so without hesitation. Saul was told not to tarry (Acts 22:16). Those on Pentecost were obedient that day (Acts 2:41). The Ethiopian stopped his chariot and obeyed (Acts 8:36-38). The jailer was baptized straitway (Acts 16:33), the same hour of the night. Lydia obeyed there by the river (Acts 17:14,15). You do not see them waiting, hesitating, postponing, refusing for some reason because they did not wish to deny themselves salvation God offered them. Nor did they wait until what so have called "Baptism

Sunday.” Such as that reflects a lack of understanding of the urgency in obeying the gospel.

Why Wait?

Once our time of opportunity is passed, which is confined to this life, and while we have presence of mind to respond from the heart (Romans 6:16-18), we shall have no other opportunity. It is not difficult for any honest person to see the folly of lingering in the state they are, outside of Christ, lost, and without hope.

Do you wonder why God spared Lot? Whatever may be the reason, the record of Lot’s deliverance from Sodom ought serve as a reminder to us that hesitation and delay is to play into the hands of the devil and surrender the call of God to the desires of Satan. As the song echoes, “There is danger and death in delay.” We see that in Lot. Wonder why some cannot see it in themselves?

* * * * *

What Makes Jesus Different?

People have different attitudes toward Jesus. Some consider Him as just another man, although exceptional. They look at Him as a great teacher, influential, but radical. But they would disrobe Him of His Deity, deny that He is the Son of God, and reduce Him to the same level of all other descendants of Adam. Some even deny that He was a real person, although these are few in number because the abundant historical evidence is too overwhelming for this to be seriously considered. But they think He is a myth, and a product of imagination.

Jesus is thought by some to have been a schemer with noble motives who tried to pull off the greatest hoax in history by making people think He arose from the dead. There is a

book entitled The Passover Plot that was on the best seller list for some years that makes the contention that Jesus deceived people into thinking He was God's Son, and devised a plan to appear to come from the dead, but a plan that backfired and He got Himself killed.

Of course, the only reliable source of information we have concerning Jesus is the inspired Word. The truth about Jesus is either there or it is not to be found. His life was noticeably void of characteristics that usually distinguish one person from another. Hebrews 2:14-18, *"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted."*

This passage presents the very heart and core of Christianity. Jesus took on the nature of humanity to make peace between God and man. Was Jesus a man? Galatians 4:4, *"But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law."* Yes, Jesus was a human being. Philippians 2:7,8 and Romans 8:3 teaches this truth as well. He had similar physical qualities, subject to hunger, weariness, pain, sadness, being tempted as all other humans are. We find Him eating, weeping, sleeping. How then was He different?

Not Different Because...

He was not different because of where He was born. Bethlehem was an insignificant village near Jerusalem, an unlikely place for God's Son to come into the world. It was not as if He was born in a palace, even the capital city, or some place of prominence.

He was not different because He was of prominent parentage of the earth. Mary, his mother, and Joseph, her husband, had no place of distinction among men. Joseph

was a humble carpenter, a respectable trade, but not one of public glamor. They had no social standing of importance. They were of modest means as is seen in the sacrifice offered at the birth of Jesus of two turtledoves, the sacrifice of the poor. They lived in the despised city of Nazareth. Jesus never became socially outstanding even though He had friends, attending social events, and performed His first miracle at a wedding. But they were not the kind of family that attracted attention. We have to look elsewhere for His distinction.

His childhood did not set Him apart except for the event recorded in Luke and His visit to the temple. He grew as other Jewish boys, *"in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."* (Luke 2:52). He was obedient to Mary and Joseph (verse 51). He did have exceptional knowledge of the Law, but we read little of anything else about His younger years.

His distinction is not in the length of His life. It was rather short, being only thirty-three or thirty-four years. Of the nearly thirteen thousand days He lived, we read of only approximately fifty of them. John does say, John 21:25, *"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen."* He was on the public scene only three and one-half years. One has said that Methuselah added years to his life, but Jesus added life to his years.

The personal appearance of Jesus was not His drawing appeal. We know nothing of His appearance except for Isaiah's prophetic comment, *"...he hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him."* (Isaiah 53:2). He did not dress in the latest styles, nor attract attention that would cause Him to appear different. His enemies had to secure the services of Judas to point Him out when they went to seize Him. He was not unlike many other men in this regard.

Jesus was not a political figure, a great athlete, a conquering general, a war hero, inventor, author, or builder of earthly empires. Such things do not set Him apart from the rest. He is different in spite of the lack of such things that usually differentiate people. It seems as if

God intended to take away such things from Him so that His real appeal would not be confused with these paltry and trivial matters.

He Was Different Because...

Scripture shows us why Jesus is different. He is the Son of God. *"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."* (Matthew 16:16). This is what puts Jesus in a class by Himself. He was Deity in the flesh, divine and human at the same time. No one before or since Jesus was in this category. Nor shall any ever be.

We have noted His humanity. What says the Scripture of His Deity? He was born of a virgin in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:18-20, 25; Luke 1:26-35). He had an earthly mother, but His Father is God. Let us insert here that the irreverent manner that many modern so-called versions of Scripture rewrite passages that assert this truth regarding Jesus is one of the reasons we abhor these "perversions." They are influenced by modernist and infidel thought and remove many God-given evidences of His Deity. Why anyone who claims to be a Christian would endorse such perversions of God's Word is beyond good sense.

Some contend that Joseph was Jesus' father. But if that were true, how do you explain Joseph being willing to take her for his wife when he knew he could not be the father of the child? How do you explain him being comforted when the angel told him this was a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy? How could Mary be with child and yet without knowing a man? How do you explain Genesis 3:15 where God said the seed of woman would bruise the head of Satan, and Satan would bruise His heel? Jesus was not the seed of man and woman, but woman.

Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit, the *"only begotten Son of God,"* a phrase some would-be "scholars" among us deny is even in the Bible. His very name is *"Emmanuel,"* which means *"God with us."* (Matthew 1:23). Such words have no meaning except in view of the virgin bearing the Child.

In the genealogy of Jesus we read how Abraham begat Isaac, Isaac begat Jacob, Jacob begat Judah, etc. Yet, in Matthew 1:16 we read, "*Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary of whom was born Jesus who is called Christ.*" The Bible insists on the birth of Jesus by the virgin. The virgin birth declares His Deity. For this reason God could and did say, "*This is my beloved Son.*"

Other Differences

Inasmuch as Jesus was different, distinguished and set apart because He was Deity, we expect to learn of other differences about Him. He was sinless (Hebrews 4:15; First Peter 2:22). He fulfilled all the ancient prophecies (Matthew 5:17,18). He possess authority that none other could possess (Matthew 7:29; 28:18). He could forgive sins (John 1:19; Matthew 9:1-6). Being God's Son, by His death, "*the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*" (Isaiah 53:6; First Timothy 1:15; Hebrews 9:28). The death of no other could accomplish what His death accomplished. He is the only One through whom we have hope of salvation (John 14:6; Acts 4:12).

The New Testament abounds in testimony and evidence that He is who He claimed to be. 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 through his name.*"

Christ is different because of who He is. His distinction is His Sonship, His Deity. On this fact rests everything about Christianity. Remove that fact and there is nothing more valid about Christianity than any other philosophy or religion.

In this lesson we have exalted Jesus as the Christ, God's Son. But have you exalted Him as He deserves? Do you believe in Him as He is? Have you come to Him as you must in order to be saved? We urge every person to consider the evidence and re-examine the indisputable testimony of Scripture concerning Him, and act in obedience to His will.

* * * * *

Sin

The very mention of sin produces varied reactions among people. One need not mention any particular sin specifically, but just “sin in general,” and he will soon learn that many people have no concern about the matter whatsoever. Believing there is no such thing as right or wrong, to them sin is an irrelevant, old-fogey superstition of centuries past. To others, sin may exist, but only insofar as one might personally consider something to be sinful. It is a purely subjective matter with them. There is no objective measure to determine sin according to some folks. What you may consider as sin, I may not, and there is no way to tell who or what is right, some say. There are, according to them, no absolutes.

Mention sin and some immediately assume a defensive posture because they realize they stand guilty, but unwilling to either admit, excuse, attempt to justify, or seek forgiveness of it. Most consider sin as something bad and to be shunned, but something of which “others” are far more guilty than themselves.

Many of us will condemn sin generally, but shy away from condemning sin specifically. When we pray, “Forgive us of our sins,” we might demand of ourselves that we name one we would admit. We need to be more specific regarding sin, privately to God, if not publicly.

Sin, regardless of people’s varying dispositions toward it, is real and widespread. Romans 3:23, *“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”* Therefore, to comment on sin is to comment on a pertinent, relevant, applicable, personal subject to everyone. Whatever sin is, all responsible people have been guilty of it one way or another, at some time or another. Each of us should be motivated to investigate this matter with a genuine personal concern about our spiritual welfare.

Facts About Sin

Scripture teaches sin is the most fearful contamination in the world, and the source of human problems because it produces human depravity and spiritual death, which means to be separated from God. Regardless of what we may accomplish or overcome in this life, unless we defeat the "*wages of sin*" we will have failed, not only in this life, but for eternity.

People classify sin, sometime in a very anti-Biblical way. There are what we call big sins and little sins, mortal sins and venial sins, your sins and my sins. The Bible does teach there are sins of commission, omission, sins of the flesh, mind, public and private sins. But sin is sin regardless of classification. This idea of big sins, little sins, mortal and venial sins comes from the imagination of men who minimize the onslaught of sin against man.

How would you classify hate, drunkenness, immodesty, stealing, adultery, murder, envy, jealousy, gossip, or greed? Is one really worse than another? While the immediate consequences or results from sins may be more severe with one sin than another, one is guilty of sin whatever way he sins. Murder may produce more drastic consequences at the moment than a lie, but both offend the holiness of God and condemn the sinner.

The Bible defines sin as lawlessness or transgression of the law (First John 3:4). "*All unrighteousness is sin.*" First John 5:17). Violation of one's conscience and conviction is sin (Romans 14:23). Leaving undone what ought to be done is also called sin (James 4:17).

Origin of Sin

Sin began in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:1-6). There was a violation of God's directives, sin entered the world, and all continue to sin (Romans 5:12). The avenue to sin is temptation, coming by the lust of the flesh, eye, and pride of life (First John 2:16). Satan used these approaches to Eve, and also to Christ (Matthew 4:1-11).

Sin begins in the heart. Proverbs 11:20, "*They that are of a froward heart are abomination to the Lord: but such as are*

upright in their way are his delight.” Proverbs 6:18, “An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations...” Proverbs 4:23, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” Matthew 15:18,19, “But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart; and they defile the man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.” Matthew 12:34,35, “O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.”

Beginning in the heart, sin becomes a reality by the process of growth from lust to sin (James 1:14,15). It is the result of sin that makes sin so fearful. It may temporarily produce pleasure (Hebrews 11:24,25). But, as James and Romans teach, it produces death, separation from God. Also see Isaiah 59:1,12 in this respect. It makes one a servant in bondage (Romans 6:16). It shows that a person is of the devil (First John 3:8). Finally, sin will prevent one from entering heaven (Revelation 21:27).

In this life we shall have a constant warfare against sin (Romans 7:14-24). Peter warned, *“Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”* (First Peter 5:8).

Prevention of Sin

What can we do to prevent sin? It is better to prevent sin than to have to be forgiven of it. Obviously, since sin comes from the heart, we must *“keep thy heart with all diligence.”* (Proverbs 4:23). But there is no way for the heart to be made pure without obedience to the truth, the Word of God (First Peter 1:22). This demands a knowledge of God's Word. Remember how Jesus used the Word of God to withstand the temptations of Satan in Matthew, chapter four? *“It is written...”* was His weapon. We have this same weapon to defend ourselves against sin and avoid it. Psalm 119:11 reads, *“Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee.”* Putting on the armor God has provided enables us to resist sin (Ephesians 6:11). Growing as a Christian will prevent sin (Second Peter 1:5-10). This demands feeding on the *“sincere milk of the word.”*

Overcoming Sin

But once we have sinned, we are powerless of ourselves and by ourselves to overcome its havoc. We are dependent on God. God has provided the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ, to "*taste of death for every man.*" (Hebrews 2:9). "What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus." Redemption is through His blood (Ephesians 1:7). We are made nigh to God, having once alienated ourselves by sin, by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:13). We can become the victor over sin rather than the victim of sin because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:13,14). This is the way God has manifested His grace toward mankind.

The only way for sin to be properly covered is for it to be forgiven (Romans 4:7,8; Psalm 32:1). We must reach the cleansing blood of Christ in order to be forgiven. We reach that blood in baptism when we are baptized into His death, for this is where His blood was shed (Romans 6:3,4; John 19:34). Having reached His blood by entrance into His body (First Corinthians 12:12,13), we are to "*walk in the light as he is in the light.*" (First John 1:7). Being faithful in that lifelong privilege, having fellowship with Deity, He will keep us clean from sin.

We must not think that remission of sins can be ours unless we obey the commands to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38). Sin destroys and it will destroy you as well as me. But "*in Christ*" we are the sons and daughters of God (Galatians 3:27). Then, even our most dreaded and deadly enemy and foe, Satan and spiritual death, can be defeated, and the victory will be ours through Christ (First Corinthians 15:57).

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Our Sins Are Washed Away

Revelation 1:5, "*Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.*" The blood of Christ is the cleansing agent by which our sins are washed away. It is, therefore, not a question whether sins are washed away, or even a question of what is the cleansing agent. The question is, "When does the blood of Christ, the cleansing agent God provides, wash away our sins?"



JAMES W. BOYD

Ananias said to Saul, Acts 22:16, "*And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*" It is when we are baptized into His death, where He shed His blood, that our sins are washed away by His blood (Romans 6: 3,4).

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